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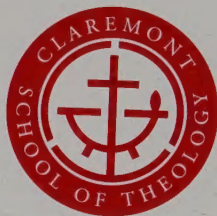
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The Cult of Draupadī

1 Mythologies: From Gingee to Kurukṣetra





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The Cult of Draupadī

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1988
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Alf Hiltebeitel

The Cult of Draupadī

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Mythologies:
From Gingee to
Kurukṣetra

The University of Chicago Press
Chicago and London

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Hiltebeitel, Alf.

The cult of Draupadī/Alf Hiltebeitel.

p. cm.

Bibliography: v. 1, p.

Includes index.

Contents: 1. Mythologies: from Gingee to Kurukṣetra.

ISBN 0-226-34045-7 (v. 1) ISBN 0-226-34046-5 (pbk.: v. 1):

1. Draupadī (Hindu mythology) 2. Mahābhārata—Criticism, interpretation, etc. 3. Draupadī (Hindu mythology)—Cult.

I. Title.

BL1138.4.D72H55 1988

294.5'211—dc19

87-27036

CIP

The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 60637

The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London

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Printed in the United States of America

97 96 95 94 93 92 91 90 89 88 54321

To my mother and father,
Lucille and George Hildebeitel,
for their love and support—
and in memory of my father,
who taught us to see

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Preface

The regional and epic mythology of the South Indian Draupadī cult may at first sound a remote and forbidding note. The region referred to in my subtitle, the medieval kingdom of Gingee, is today little known and scantily studied. And the Indian epic which has Draupadī as its chief heroine is that literary hulk the *Mahābhārata*, perhaps known by name, or even recallable as a familiar tale, but daunting in its true massiveness and complexity. However, this is not a study of obscure kingdoms and arcane epic symbolisms. It is an exploration, through the study of a singularly representative cult, of the inner dynamics of popular devotional Hinduism.

Through its twelve years in the works, it has remained from the beginning my guiding intention to present this study as an account of the relation between the South Indian, Tamil “folk” traditions of the Draupadī cult and the pan-Indian, classical structure of the Sanskrit epic. To set this volume in perspective, however, it is worth tracing a few of the false starts that this intention has spawned. First of all, the decision to focus study on a single cult was made after certain early trials and errors. It meant rethinking and rejecting an initial format, which was to do an in-depth study of the cult’s epic-related myths and rituals by looking primarily at one temple. Much material was gathered toward that end at Tindivanam. But over the years, the more I studied the Tindivanam temple and its annual festival, the more I found that I needed to know about other Draupadī temples and their festivals. For one thing, the different itinerant performers—epic reciters and actors—who came to Tindivanam from year to year not only varied in their own repertoires, but volunteered information on differing practices at other temples and festivals where they had worked. Above all, the more I listened at Tindivanam, the more I heard of connections between Draupadī and Gingee, the region’s medieval capital, whose fortified mountains could be pointed out on the western horizon from Tindivan-

am's rooftops, about twenty miles away. It thus had become evident by 1981 that Gingee's secrets must be plumbed for what they would reveal about the Draupadī cult as a whole: its regional foothold, its forgotten history, and the relation between the cult's Gingee mythology and its mythology of the *Mahābhārata*. And from one angle, that is the subject of this book, which limits itself wherever possible to the Draupadī cult's mythology. But the completion of the larger study must still transpire over two more volumes, a decision also arrived at only after another run of false starts that sought out various ways, all of which eventually proved impossible, to bring the whole under one cover. A second book will thus focus on Draupadī cult rituals, a topic that will allow me both to delve deeper and range wider historically and geographically in the study of the goddess than is wise in a study on myth. And the third volume—some portions of which have already been published in preliminary form (Hiltebeitel 1980b, 1980c, 1981, 1984a, 1985b)—will be a retrospective on the Sanskrit epic from the standpoint of the Draupadī cult, that is, a *Mahābhārata* interpreted through the centrality of the goddess.

In characterizing this volume as part of the study of a cult, I am pleased to note that Obeyesekere (1984, xv, 5–9) undertook his beautiful study of the Pattini cult in Sri Lanka and South India with a similar field plan, and that he arrived at a likeminded conclusion with regard to the value of studying a cult over time and space rather than attempting to catch its essentials through a traditional one-village monograph. A similar intention is evident behind other cult studies such as those of Stanley and of Sontheimer on Khaṇḍobā, and most notably Eveline Masilamani-Meyer's marvelous work on the Tamil cult of Ankāḷammaṇ. But once having identified this study as that of a cult, one also risks confusion. Not only are there other regional cults of various deities like those just mentioned, but hero cults, village goddess cults, cults of lineage and caste deities, royal cults, possession cults, cults of boundary deities, and so on, not to mention the Brahmanical temple cults of the great gods of the Hindu pantheon: Viṣṇu, Śiva, the goddess, Murukan, Gaṇeśa. What makes the Draupadī cult "singularly representative" of popular devotional Hinduism is that it incorporates dimensions of all such cults.

Yet beyond locating the Draupadī cult amid other such phenomena, this study will find it singularly representative on other levels as well. It is hard to imagine a cult that would provide richer possibilities for understanding the working dynamics and inner tensions of lived Hinduism. (Note that for the moment I avoid the

terms "popular" and "folk," for the Draupadī cult is unintelligible without recognizing the "classical" and even Vedic strains that intertwine, from the bottom up, with its "folk" roots and branches.) Though I hate to speak of anything so rich and vital as the subject of a "case study," it must be admitted that something of this sort is intended in this work. The Draupadī cult invites review and reworking of so many of the "reflexive" oppositions that have enlivened Indological studies—and parallel studies in related fields—over recent decades: not only the folk/classical, Vedic/Hindu, and popular/Brahmanical oppositions just alluded to, but the oppositions between the village and the region, the regional and the pan-Indian (including the Islamic) and pan-Hindu, the historical and the mythic, the *saṃsāric* (this-worldly) and the *mokṣic* (release-oriented), the Aryan and the Dravidian, and the Sanskritic and the vernacular.

Pivotal to all these representative oppositions, however, are the two dimensions of the Draupadī cult whose combination makes it so singular: the centrality of the goddess, and the determinitiveness of the *Mahābhārata*. Let us imagine what we might learn of Greek religion and culture if we found in what remains of some out-of-the-way medieval Greek kingdom that the current-day Macedonian firewalking cult of Saint Helen and her son, the emperor Constantine (see Makrakis 1982; Furley 1981, 212–33; Danforth 1979), were really about the *Iliad* and Helen of Troy, and that the epic Helen had taken birth a second time as the saint in a fashion that linked both incarnations in a common mythology and theology to aspects of Demeter, Athena, Aphrodite, Artemis, Medea, Medusa, and the Virgin Mary. The Draupadī cult presents us with such connections. In the Indian context, however, the goddess and the *Mahābhārata* have shared for centuries a cultural and religious centrality in which the connections between them are real and perennial, and integrated with deep structures whose continuities and transformations through time, space, and differing social contexts we have only begun to understand. In part, then, this book is a study of continuities and discontinuities in the cult of the goddess and the transmission of the *Mahābhārata* as they relate to each other, and as they work together to sustain the fundamental values and vitality of Hinduism. And more generally, it is an attempt to study some of the more far-ranging themes and issues of Hindu mythology through the dynamics of this ongoing relation.

As regards the goddess, this Preface need not say much. Numerous studies have begun to make her familiar, and I will cite many of them. Insofar as this work points toward an integrated

study of the Hindu goddess (which is itself a desideratum), it does so by correlating Draupadī's mythology with the following primary linkages: the "pan-Indian" *Devī Māhātmyam*, or "Glorification of the Goddess," the classical Sanskrit text that first synthesizes early material on the goddess, most notably in her forms as Durgā, Slayer of the Buffalo Demon, and Kālī; the Sanskritic-Brahmanical royal ritual of Dasarā, which is equally "pan-Indian," and, with its buffalo sacrifice, correlated with the *Devī Māhātmyam*; the springtime festivals to local village and regional goddesses, which recapitulate aspects of Dasarā; and the cults of caste and lineage goddesses, which share so much common ground with village and regional cults. In addition, Draupadī's Tamil milieu links her mythology with the goddess myths of the great South Indian Brahmanical temples, most notably those of Mīnākṣī of Madurai, Kāmākṣī of Kanchipuram, and the buffalo-slaying and androgyne myths of the goddess of Tiruvannamalai. The last two sites are well within the Gingee region.

As to the *Mahābhārata*, I must attempt to be a little more helpful. Although the first chapter will introduce the Draupadī cult's *Mahābhārata* through the medium of songs of praise, and the entire second part of this book will treat the epic from different cult-related angles, I can say a few things here about the epic that will make this study more accessible to readers unfamiliar with it.

First of all, one has the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*. Its composition is conventionally dated between 500 B.C. and A.D. 400. It presents a global view of India, but its central action is in the north, in the Ganges-Yamuna doab. No texts as such survive from this time, and by the medieval period, from which the oldest versions of the Sanskrit epic survive, the work exists in at least two major recensions: the northern and the southern. By the medieval period, the *Mahābhārata* had also been recast in South Indian vernacular languages, with the oldest versions being in Tamil. There are some indications that the Tamil epic tradition is closer to the southern recension of the Sanskrit epic than to the northern. But more evident, the Tamil versions, from as far back as one can identify their contents, are more closely linked with distinctive regional folklores than they are with anything distinctive about the southern recension of the Sanskrit epic. This would also seem to be the case for other South Indian vernacular versions of the *Mahābhārata* as well. With this point in mind, one should stress that the *Mahābhārata* cannot be viewed *simply* as a classical text, for even if there were once a prototype, it no longer exists. Rather, I take my cue from the situation as we find it, and approach the epic as an ongoing, fluid tradition, one sustained both in Sanskritic and vernacular

forms, and—in what does not always amount to the same thing—in classical and folk forms as well.

Second, the classical epic involves a central story. It is told through eighteen epic “books” (*parvans*), a structure it retains in Tamil versions as well. I summarize here the classical tale as it parallels the version that will become familiar through the Draupadī cult, which concerns itself with only the first twelve of those parvans.

The first book (*Ādi Parvan*, or “Book of Beginnings”) tells of the genealogy of the Lunar dynasty up through the births of the two groups of cousins, the five Pāṇḍavas and the hundred Kauravas, who vie with each other for the sole right to the central throne. In this book, the Pāṇḍavas jointly marry the princess Draupadī, the incarnation of Prosperity and Sovereignty (*śrī*), and ally themselves with Kṛṣṇa, the incarnation of the god Viṣṇu. In the second book, the *Sabhā Parvan*, or “Book of the Assembly (or Assemblies),” the jealous Kauravas scheme to win everything from the Pāṇḍavas in a dice match. Draupadī herself is momentarily gambled away and molested. Then, once she rejoins her husbands, their gambling losses require them to undertake twelve years of forest exile (the subject of book three, the *Āraṇyaka Parvan*, or “Book of Forest Teachings”), followed by one year incognito (subject of the fourth book, the *Virāṭa Parvan*, telling of their concealment in the kingdom of King Virāṭa). Should they succeed in passing the year unrecognized, they are promised the return of their share of the kingdom. But when the time is up and they have ostensibly met these conditions, the Kauravas refuse to uphold the agreement. All the while, Draupadī has really been seeking revenge, and the Pāṇḍavas have been preparing for war. So now in the fifth book—the *Udyoga Parvan*, or “Book of the Effort”—both sides gather allies, the Pāṇḍavas most notably securing the aid of Kṛṣṇa, and prepare for battle on the plain of Kurukṣetra. Six more *parvans* then recount the battle and its immediate aftermath. Just before the war, Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna—his own cross-cousin and deep friend, and the greatest warrior of the Pāṇḍava brothers—why Arjuna must fight. This is the occasion of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, “The Lord’s Song,” which is thus a pivotal text within the Sanskrit epic. Then, guided by Kṛṣṇa, the Pāṇḍavas win the devastating battle in eighteen days. The eldest of the five brothers, Yudhiṣṭhira, is at last enthroned. And as this is where the Draupadī cult brings its version of the *Mahābhārata* to its culmination and effective conclusion, we need follow the story no further.

Beyond such a basic outline, the genealogical table in appendix 1 should be noted as a useful point of reference, one serving in particular to afford an early glimpse of where it is that the Drau-

padī cult's *Mahābhārata* makes its folk accentuations and innovations. But the cult's epic mythology cannot really be disentangled from its regional mythology. So with this in mind, let me close this Preface with a few further remarks about my subtitle. First, though the main focus of this book is on the cult's double mythologies of Gingee and Kurukṣetra, I begin — after the evocations of chapter 1 — by attempting to set Draupadī's Gingee mythology and her cult as a whole in their regional, historical, and sociological context. We do not get to the Draupadī cult's Gingee mythology proper until chapter 5. But the whole of part 1 seeks to make not only the Gingee mythology, but eventually the cult's epic mythology (the subject of part 2), contextually intelligible. In moving from Gingee to Kurukṣetra, then, we move from the relatively unfamiliar "Gingee" to the relatively familiar *Mahābhārata*, and from the ethnological present to the past of epic myth, a myth that for the Draupadī cult has both its Gingee and Kurukṣetra variations. Such a movement will allow us to see that Draupadī's Gingee mythology is mirrored in virtually all the major innovations in the cult's *Mahābhārata*. We will find this to be so first and foremost in the double mythologies of Draupadī's two guardians, Pōttu Rāja and Muttāl Rāvuttaṇ, which make the Gingee/Kurukṣetra opposition self-evident and which virtually require the prior treatment of Gingee, since these heroes do not appear in the classical epic. But it is also true of the double mythologies of Draupadī's dishevelled hair, or her forest transformations, and of the complexes associating Brahmarākṣasas and the heads of Brahmins. Additionally, the subtitle allows me to pay homage to the late Stig Wikander, who inaugurated the present era of *Mahābhārata* scholarship in 1947, and deepened his interpretation in 1960 with his highly important but still too little appreciated article "Från Brävalla till Kurukshetra." Where Wikander took us to Kurukṣetra via Indo-European epic mythology from the Swedish plain of Brävällir, this book takes us to the same destination via South Indian epic mythology from the forts and forests of Gingee. We will thus begin our entrée into Gingee with the songs that refer to it as the site of Draupadī's second advent.

Acknowledgments

In the preface to *The Hill of Devi*, his book of letters from two stays in India, E. M. Forster said it as simply as one can: "It was the great opportunity of my life." I only hope that the scholarly apparatus of this book does not obscure what is to me its deeper significance as a tangible gesture of thanks to all who made my opportunity far richer than a scholar's book could ever express. Above all, this thanks goes to the people I met connected with the Draupadī temples and festivals I studied in the cities, towns, and villages of Tamilnadu, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh. I mention only those whom I came to know best through repeated get-togethers: the dramatist brothers R. S. Natarajan and R. S. Mayakrishnan with their traveling world of wonders; the pāratīyār (*Mahābhārata* reciter) V. M. Brameesa Mudaliyar, now deceased, the seasoned scholar, most fondly remembered; the Tindivanam Draupadī temple pūcāri V. Govindaswami, wry and free; the icon sculptor and painter M. Dandapani, impeccable craftsman; and the temple trustees V. S. Purushottama Chettiar of Tindivanam, M. Durai of Mañkaḷam, and K. Gopala Goundar of Mēlaccēri, for each of whom the life of their temples was a treasure to be shared. Many others in such roles as these will be mentioned in the book, and they must also be acknowledged for their help and encouragement, as must countless others who will be unnamed but whose hospitality, cooperation, and interest I hope this work will reflect.

Next I must thank my windows to this Tamil world: above all, my friend and Tamil interpreter C. T. Rajan, companion on virtually all my fieldwork. A man with his own anthropological training and instincts, the spirit of this study became his as well as mine, and many of its insights began with Rajan's digging, careful listening and observation, and sudden realizations. For their help and encouragement in working on Tamil texts, let me also thank Pon Kothandaraman of the Department of Tamil Literature, University

of Madras; his former students and now colleagues N. Deiva Sundaram and D. Murthy; and C. Jagannathachariar, Retired Professor of Tamil at Vivekananda College, Madras. Thanks also to Professors K. T. Pandurangi and M. Sivakumara Swamy, who kindly aided me in some of my fieldwork in Karnataka, and to Professor G. N. Reddy for similarly guiding me in Andhra.

In its writing, this work has gone through two main revolutions. The first, largely methodological, was inspired by Madeleine Biardeau: initially through conversations and then through the unforgettable experience of reading in draft form her still unpublished study of the sacrificial post (Biardeau, in press). I thank her for making the latter accessible to me, and for so many rich and enjoyable exchanges. The second, largely a revolution in content, was inspired by Eveline Masilamani-Meyer's study of the cult of Draupadī's sister goddess Aṅkāḷamman (Meyer 1984). I thank her too for sending this study to me in prepublished form, and for a most informative correspondence. To David Shulman, whose *Tamil Temple Myths* is a prerevolutionary source of so many of this book's insights, I owe a variety of thanks for his ongoing help and encouragement, and above all for agreeing to be this book's first reader and most helpful critic. My gratitude also goes to many other colleagues and friends, especially Indira Peterson, who gave me my main stateside boosts with Tamil, Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty for many fruitful exchanges and a most stimulating reading of this book's penultimate draft, and W. Randolph Kloetzli for hearing out and reading through so many of my ideas as I worked to give them shape.

Thanks also to Velcheru Narayana Rao, Brenda E. F. Beck, Fred Clothey, Guy Richard Welbon, Margaret Trawick Egnor, Glenn Yocum, John Stratton Hawley, M. N. Deshpande, William Harman, Chris Fuller, Frédérique Appfel Marglin, Paul Courtright, Doris Srinivasan, Bruno Dagens, K. V. Raman, Richard Frasca, Stuart Blackburn, David W. Shideler, J. Rajasekaran, and Carolyn Henning Brown. To Brenda and Bob Mayes, immense thanks for their care and help with the maps and photographs. The photographs, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

As a study that took far longer than I ever anticipated, I thank all those institutions that sensed a purpose in its pace of maturation by supporting my research financially: the American Institute of Indian Studies for a 1974–75 year's grant; the National Endowment for the Humanities for a 1977 summer stipend; the Joint Indo-U.S. Subcommission on Education and Culture for a year's grant in 1981–82; the Guggenheim Foundation for support for writing in

1982–83; the American Philosophical Society for a grant in 1984; and the George Washington University Faculty Research Facilitating Fund for varied and continued support along the way.

To Helen, Adam, and Simon, thanks for suffering my demons with me, and for sharing the ineradicable images of our nights in Pakkiripālaiyam.

Conventions

With few exceptions, Tamil terms follow the transcriptions of the *Tamil Lexicon* and Sanskrit terms the transcriptions found in most Sanskrit dictionaries. Where terms from other South Indian languages are cited, I generally follow the transcriptions of my sources, the one exception being the spelling Pōta Rāju as a consistent rendering for this name in Telugu. Names of Tamil districts, Taluk towns, and informants are given without diacritics in the manner that one finds them most readily on maps, or in the manner that they are signed using an English alphabet. No names of villages or individuals have been disguised. Names and terms from the *Mahābhārata* are generally given in their more familiar Sanskrit forms, as are certain other Sanskrit terms. But Tamil equivalents are usually noted. And in certain cases—the name Pāñcālī, the term *pūcāri*, the cry “Kōvintā”—the Tamil form is retained as a simple reminder that the sounds of Tamil should really ring throughout.

I

From Gingee

1 Introduction: Invocatory Songs to Draupadī, “The Lady Who Resides in Gingee”

There is an invocatory song, a “song of praise” (*tutip pāṭal*), that the dramatists who perform at Draupadī festivals sing at the beginnings and ends of their nightlong dramas. At around 10 P.M., before the first characters are introduced, it is sung chorally, along with other songs, as the audience gathers to sit on the ground surrounding the stage. And come dawn, after the play is over, the leading actor, in certain plays impersonating Draupadī herself, sings it, backed by some of the troupe’s musicians, while circumambulating the processional icons. These icons—usually including one of Draupadī in combination with other epic figures—will have arrived to “watch” the conclusion of the drama after touring the town or village till late into the night on a richly decorated bullock cart or “chariot” to announce the drama and the goddess’s local sovereignty during the time of her festival. The actor circumambulates the “chariot” icons holding aloft a tray bearing a camphor flame and turmeric powder, and he daubs spots of turmeric onto the foreheads of those who have been moved by the drama to come forth to receive this mark of yellow powder as a sign of Draupadī’s blessing. Yet the song is not just about the epic Draupadī. The goddess who tours the village on her “chariot” and whose epic story is enacted on stage will have her fixed and locally presiding stone icon in her village temple, where her priest, or *pūcāri* (Sanskrit *pūjārī*), honors her with songs that are similar to the dramatists’ song in one signal respect: both invoke her as “the lady who resides in Gingee.” At all such singings, the claim is thus renewed that Draupadī is not only the chief heroine of the *Mahābhārata*, but a goddess connected with the rural market town of Gingee (Tamil Ceñci), today a taluk headquarters in one of the most out-of-the-way, depopulated, nonindustrialized, hot, mountainously rugged, boulder-ridden, and beautiful areas of Tamilnadu, and once the home of kings.

The focus of the song, however, is not Gingee town, nor is it simply the more celebrated Gingee Fort, along side of which the town grew up and in a sense outlasted as an administrative center once the fort was finally abandoned in 1761 after over five centuries of dramatic history. Though the song certainly evokes the royal splendors and horrors of Gingee's past, it focuses above all on a small village called Mēlaccēri, which lies about three miles to the north of the Gingee Fort. This village is still known as "Old Gingee" (*palaiya ceñci*) and has traces of ancient fortifications estimated to have been built around A.D. 1200 and to antedate the first constructions of the Gingee Fort proper (Srinivasachari 1943, 31; Heras 1926, 42). It is here in Mēlaccēri that the world of the Draupadī cult has its tenuous foothold in both history and myth.

Our opening version of the dramatists' song, sung for my benefit and taped in the fall of 1981, has eighteen verses, a number that is perhaps significant. Eighteen is not only the mythical number associated with the *Mahābhārata*, whose war took eighteen days; it is classically the number of weapons that the goddess Durgā holds in her eighteen arms (Jagadisvarananda 1972, 24; Gopinatha Rao 1971, 1: 350). Such a correlation was not aired by the singers of the song, the brothers R. S. Natarajan and R. S. Mayakrishnan, who shall be cited frequently as my two main informants on the *teruk-kūttu* dramas (the term means "street dramas") that are performed at Draupadī festivals. There are other verses of this song—additional verses, alternates, modifications—that were mentioned to me or sung in other contexts, so it is possible that the eighteen-stanza frame is fortuitous. But I mention it because one will find over and over that even when the Draupadī cult seems to take us far from the *Mahābhārata*, as for instance in connecting Draupadī with Gingee, it usually still requires the *Mahābhārata* to explain the transformations. Indeed, the song itself, in its fifth verse, encourages such associations:

1. O Lady who resides in Gingee [*ceñci patiyālē*], my mother, our beautiful goddess,
2. Leaving your Gingee residence [*nī ceñci patiyai viṭṭu*], my mother, turn this face [of yours toward us].
3. She who is born is Kāṅkēyaṇ's village,¹ my mother, our Kāṅ-
ṭipāṇ's wife [wife of Arjuna, wielder of the Gāṇḍīva bow],
4. For the Pāṇḍavas who went to the forest, my mother, you
went as Vīraśakti [the goddess as "Heroic Power"] to be
their escort [i.e., to help them].

1. Kāṅkēyaṇ is a name for Skanda-Murukaṇ, and also of Bhīṣma. The reference is unexplained.

5. The five [Pāṇḍavas live] by you, my mother; the eighteen-day Pāratam is [done] by you.²
6. Your shelter [kuṭiyiruppu: "residence," or even "village"] is the forest, my mother; your hand-lamp [kaiviḷakku] there is a glimmering mirage [kāṇal].
7. For resting your head, you have the border of a paddy field, my mother; straw is your cotton bed.
8. Repeats 7.
9. As you protected the five, my mother, protect these children.
10. Repeats 9.
11. O our mother, mother, my mother [eṇkaḷ annaiyē mātāvē en ammaṇī], you are the chaste lady [pattinī] for our apicēka [ritual bathing of the icon; Sanskrit *abhiṣeka*].
12. Basically repeats 11.
13. With [only] our stomachs as sustenance, O world mother, supreme goddess [Paramēcuvārī], we live by you.
14. Leaving your Gingee residence, our mother Draupadī, mother, turn this face [of yours toward us].
15. Having said I live by you, O mother of my house, we scold you.
16. As you protected the Pāṇḍavas, my mother, protect these children.
17. Basically repeats 16.
18. O our mother, mother, my mother. Chaste lady for the apicēka. Chaste lady for the apicēka.

It would be no great exaggeration to say that the remainder of the first two volumes of this study will consist of unpacking the implications of this song. So I must not dwell on it for too long at this point. But we can observe a few of its more significant themes by enlisting some of the song's alternate or additional verses, and by comparing it with the similar but much longer chants—which clearly draw on the same stock of images and vocabulary but modify them to different meters—that are sung by Draupadī temple pūcāris before the temple icons. Known as "pūcāri songs" (*pūcārip pāṭṭu*), two such songs were located in small printed handbooks available to priests for their temple services, and one was recorded as sung by V. Govindaswami, the pūcāri of the Tindivanam Draupadī temple. In terms already familiar, the pūcāris sing these songs

2. One does best here with a neutral verb. The verse alludes to the eighteen-day Pāratam (Bhārata) festival that is held on Draupadī's account, and to the eighteen-day war that is fought on her behalf and—as we shall see—"won" by Draupadī herself.

while performing their apicēkas—lustrations with different liquid substances of the stone image (or images) in the inner sanctum—and other *pūjā* offerings to the “chaste lady” Draupadī. It is highly appropriate to begin our study of the Draupadī cult with such songs, meant to “invite” the goddess, to call her into the minds and hearts of her devotees.

Though it is finally all too arbitrary a division, let us discuss these songs under three headings: (1) allusions to the classical (Tamil as well as Sanskrit) *Mahābhārata*; (2) “folk” modifications of this “classical” epic tradition; and (3) deepening evocations of the Hindu goddess.

As regards the classical tradition, the dramatists’ song actually carries one through the main epic story, summarized in our Preface, by highlighting a sequence of prominent episodes. But also significant are some of its omissions. Passing over Draupadī’s miraculous birth from fire (an episode highlighted in all the *pūcāri* songs),³ it opens onto Draupadī’s epic career with her marriage to Arjuna, “our Kāṇṭipān” (verse 3). Both of the printed *pūcāri* songs also refer to their wedding, but sing as well, at least by implication, of Draupadī’s multiple marriage to all five of the Pāṇḍava brothers, Arjuna included:

He garlanded you, Mother, by bending the bow, Vijayaṇ, O
Mother, Arjuna,

By shooting the arrow, Mother, he garlanded [you], Kāṇṭipān,
Arjuna.

To all five [Pāṇḍavas] you are the ever-living Parāśakti, O
Mother Draupadī.

(Cattivēl Ceṭṭiyār, n.d. [henceforth CC], 31–32, ll. 17–22)

There is perhaps a hint here that Draupadī’s multiple marriage is problematic: there is no hesitation in evoking the details of her union with Arjuna; but her relation to the five Pāṇḍavas casts her as their “Supreme Śakti”—all-powerful goddess—rather than their wife. It would appear that the relative silence and the theological intensification in the verses represent detours around a danger-filled theme. If so, the same reasoning may also help to account for the omission in most of these songs of the nefarious episodes of the dice match and disrobing: the scenes in which the Pāṇḍavas bet Draupadī away as the final stake in the dice match, and then

3. One may observe that these accentuations are not innocent. *Pūcāris* are preeminent among those concerned with Draupadī cult fire rituals, and the dramatists normally begin their cycle of *Mahābhārata* dramas with a play about Draupadī’s marriage (see below, chaps. 7–9).

have to watch ignominiously while the Kauravas humiliate and defile her by trying to disrobe her. Only the Tindivanam pūcārī's song mentions this incident, but he transforms it from a scene of degradation into an anticipation of victory:

[With] the wicked Duryodhana you played dice and enjoyed it [*tuṭṭa turiyōtiraṇ pakatāiyai āṭi kaḷittavaḷum nī*].

The Draupadī cult generally understands these incidents as dark, dangerous, and inauspicious: it is because of them that Draupadī makes her violent vows of revenge. So it is likely that they are omitted from most of the songs because, as songs of praise and invitation, they call on Draupadī primarily in her succoring and merciful forms.

Immediately after her marriage to Arjuna, the next scenes alluded to in the dramatists' song (verse 4; cf. verses 6–10, 16–17) and the printed pūcārī songs are those of the exile in the forest. Indeed, all the songs except the Tindivanam pūcārī's mention the period of forest exile (though not the period in disguise). What is most striking, the forest scenes provide the setting for some of the major transformations that Draupadī undergoes. Thus it is she who protects the Pāṇḍavas, not the reverse:

For the Pāṇḍavas who went into the forest, you were the helpmate [*kaṭukatuṇai*; *tuṇai*, as in verse 4 above, connotes divine help, as in the invocation of a deity]; for the twelve years you protected them at your side.

(CC, 31, ll. 29–31)

Like a "glimmering mirage," she lights their path (verse 6 above); she "shows the path" (*vaḷi kāṭṭum*) to the Pāṇḍavas during their "forest residence" (*vaṇavācam*; *ibid.*, 31, ll. 27–28). It is also the point in the story when Draupadī's proverbial hardships are cast in images familiar to her devotees (see verse 7 above). But for the most part the allusions to the "forest Draupadī" accentuate themes of power and violence that follow directly from the prior scenes in which she is humiliated and calls for revenge. We shall return to these forest transformations, which have tremendous implications for the Draupadī cult: not only for its epic mythology, but for its setting in Gingee.

Once the thirteen-year period of exile is over, the Kauravas refuse to return the Pāṇḍavas' share of the kingdom, and, as the dramatists' song (echoed by the printed pūcārī songs)⁴ says, "the

4. Nārāyaṇacāmi Mutaliyār 1978 [henceforth NM], 16, 1. 30: "Only by you is the Pāratam" (*pāratamum vunnālē tān*); cf. line 5 above; and CC 31, 1. 23: "By you, mother, is the burden" (*pāramum ampāl vunnālē*), no doubt a variant or even a pun.

eighteen-day Pāratam"—that is, the eighteen-day battle of Kurukṣetra and the Draupadī festival that commemorates it—is "by you." Finally, the dramatists' song closes its allusions to the classical story by repeating, in lines 11, 12, and 18, that Draupadī is a "chaste lady" suitable for apicēka: here not only the daily apicēkas performed in her temple, but the "coronation apicēka" (*paṭṭāpicēkam*) in which she is crowned with Dharma (Yudhiṣṭhira, the eldest of her Pāṇḍava husbands) in a ceremony that follows other rites that mark the end of the war at the close of Draupadī's festivals.

As to themes that involve transformations of the epic story, let us first note that both of the printed pūcāri songs begin, like the dramatists' song, with evocations of Gingee:

O good mother who resides in Gingee [*ceñci nalla tātē patiyālē*],

Mother, daughter-in-law of prosperous Kuntī [*celvakunti*: Kuntī is the mother of the three eldest Pāṇḍavas].

(CC, 31, ll. 1-2)

O good mother who resides in Gingee,

O prosperous lady [*celvatiyē*], Mother Draupadī.

(NM, 15, ll. 1-2)

It is possible that the first of these two opening stanzas refers to the inner sanctum of the Mēlaccēri Draupadī temple, where an unusual if not unique configuration finds an image of Kuntī next to that of Draupadī (see plates 1 and 2). Otherwise, one simply has evidence of the similarity and interchangeability of the lines of these various songs.

More subtly intertwined with the traditional story are transformations of the character and role of Draupadī herself. I have already mentioned some of those that concern the "forest Draupadī," in particular ones that involve power and violence. Indeed, she goes into the forest as Vīraśakti, the "Heroic Śakti" (see verse 4), a form that, as we shall see, is unknown even to her husbands. More than this, her fierce form is portrayed as an extension of her forest chastity, a combination of themes that goes far beyond her portrayal in classical epic traditions. The *Mahābhārata* does, to be sure, convey the impression that Draupadī abstains from sexual relations with her husbands during the period of forest exile (Hiltebeitel 1981, 187-90, 204-5). But beyond that interval, she is a normal wife and mother. In the Draupadī cult, however, she is a virgin. This is only hinted at in the dramatists' song's references to her "chastity." A *patni* (verses 11, 17 and 18; Sanskrit *patnī*) is a wife, but with the

connotation of one who remains faithful to her husband (cf. Sanskrit *pativrata*). But it can also refer to a virgin. The chapbook *pūcāri* songs leave no doubt that Draupadī is the latter:

You are a virgin lady [*kumāriyarē*], my mother, O Śakti-mother
[*cattiyammā*],
You are the fire, my mother, which cannot be touched [*aṇṭāta*]
(NM, 16, ll. 10–11)

For the five Pāṇḍavas,
You are the unruined [*aliyāta*; or undeflowered]⁵ Draupadī.
(Ibid., ll. 39–40)

From the epic heroine, wife, and mother, Draupadī has become a pure virgin, untouchable as the fire of her birth,⁶ and mother not so much of her children—a point to recall, for she still has the Pāṇḍavas' sons—as of her worshippers.

As you protected the Pāṇḍavas, my mother, protect these
[your] children [verse 16 above].

These transformations are rich with mythological and ritual implications for the Draupadī cult's vision of the *Mahābhārata*. But it is clear that they confront us already with aspects of Draupadī the goddess.

On this score, these devotional songs are filled with references to themes that can only unfold gradually in the course of our study. Draupadī is, for instance, not only the “mother of my house” (*em maṇai āttāvē*; verse 15 above), familiar enough to be scolded. In one of the variant lines of the dramatists' song, she is “the *kulateyvam* [Sanskrit *kuladeva*, *kuladevatā*] who lives in [her] Gingee residence [*ceñci-patiyil vāḷkinra kulateyvam*].” In other words, one aspect of Draupadī's associations with Gingee is that she is a “lineage deity,” worshipped, as are many other heroic, warrior forms of the goddess, in the male descent lines (that is, among *paṅkāḷis*, “shareholders” of family holdings) of specific castes.

The songs also deepen Draupadī's identification as a form of the goddess, both mythologically and cosmologically. Variant verses of the dramatists' song and verses of the *pūcāri* songs connect her with the lion: ultimately the mount of the warrior goddess Durgā,

5. My thanks to David Shulman for indicating this second “common” meaning.

6. Cf. Shulman 1986, 108 n. 6, 118, which finds the same link between fire and “untouchability” in Tamil folk epic traditions about Sitā.

but also, more locally in South Indian villages, the vehicle of various "village goddesses" headed by Māriyamman:

You are the lion by your gait [*cimmamalla naṭaiyālē*; from a version of their song written down by my dramatist informants rather than recorded].

Riding the lion mount, please come with special favor.

(NM, 16, ll. 44–45)

Furthermore, in both of the printed pūcāri songs, the references to the lion mount are evoked in connection with a special relationship between Draupadī and Kṛṣṇa. For Draupadī, like many other South Indian forms of the goddess, is identified as Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu's sister.⁷ In principle, this relationship is one that extends between all forms, or *avatāras*, of Viṣṇu and all forms of the goddess. Thus a variant verse of the dramatists' song "incongruously" affiliates Draupadī with Rāmā, the hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa*: "Our Śrī Rāman's sister, she who resides in Gingee." But it is one of the printed pūcāri songs that develops this combination of themes most richly:

To Māyaṇ [Viṣṇu, but more pointedly Kṛṣṇa] who measured
[the worlds],

You are the beautiful sister [*aḷaku taṅkaiaṇaṇaḷē*].

To Māyaṇ who measured the earth, you are the youthful
[*maṅkai*] sister.

My God's helpmate [*emperumāṇ tuṇaiyālē*],

Lady who has conquered everything,

Sitting on the back of the lion

Please come here to grace us

Holding the trident in your hand.

(CC, 32, ll. 33–38)

We shall have many reminders of this multifaceted victorious collaboration between Draupadī and Kṛṣṇa, or between the goddess and Viṣṇu, and for that matter the relation of both to Śiva, the usual bearer of the trident (*cūlam*; Sanskrit *śūla*). But for the moment, in closing our discussion of these invocatory songs, we should let them open out onto their grandest visions of Draupadī as the

7. This sibling relationship between Viṣṇu and the goddess is common in Tamil mythology and is most notable at Madurai where Viṣṇu marries his sister Mīnākṣī to Śiva. But the theme is traceable to the Sanskrit *Harivaṃśa*, the "appendix" to the *Mahābhārata*, where the goddess takes birth as Kṛṣṇa's sister (see further chap. 9, sec. A, and chap. 10, sec. B).

goddess. The image through which this is most persistently accomplished is that of fire, beginning with the classical theme of Draupadī's birth from the sacrificial fire. The Tindivanam pūcārī's song saves this theme for its concluding two verses:

Affectionate Pāñcālī, you are the precious woman born in the sacrificial fire [*aṇṇpāna pāñcālī ekkiyaṇ tannilē arumai peṇ pirantavaḷum nī*];
Sister of the primal Nārāyaṇa [Viṣṇu], O Draupadī, rare parrot [*arunkilī*] Pāñcālī.

Still more forcefully, the two printed pūcārī songs invoke Draupadī's "untouchability"—already referred to in relation to her virginity, and suggesting not only purity but potentially destructive violence—in connection with her identity as the goddess (or mother) of fire, and relate these images to a grand cosmological vision:

Not touchable [*aṇṇāta*], my mother, you are the fire, mother
[or Fire-mother, Fire-goddess; *neruppēyammā*]
Who cannot be controlled by anyone else, my mother
Draupadī.

You are the great fire [*perumneruppē*], my mother, not touchable [*tīṇṇāta*].

You are the lady who burned the Triple City, my mother,
You are the only one among the three eyes [of Śiva], O mother.

O Draupadī, my mother, you are the three flames [of sacrifice; or of the sun, moon, and fire].

(NM, 16, ll. 11–15)

Here Draupadī's associations with fire deepen her affinities with Śiva, the usual destroyer of the Triple City (Tripura), god of the three eyes, and of the "great fire" of the dissolution of the universe. Equally all-embracing, however, are the intensifications of Draupadī's associations with fire in the other printed song:

You are the Primal Śakti, Mother Draupadī,
Who came and rose from fire, O mother.
Mother Śakti, Mother Draupadī,
O mother, you who rose, rushing forth
From the sacrificial fire of Pāñcālāṇ [Draupadī's father].
Not touchable, mother, you are the fire, mother [again,
neruppēyammā],

O mother, lady who is there in the universe great and small
[*aṇṇapīṇṇam tāyē ānavaḷē*],

If one sees you in the daytime, you are Pārvatī.

In the nighttime, you have become the stars [? *nī nātakṣatayāl*,
probably from Sanskrit *nakṣatram*].

(CC, 31, ll. 8–16)

It is hardly accidental that it is especially the pūcāri songs that highlight Draupadī's associations with fire. It is usually the pūcāris who play the most prominent ritual roles in the firewalking ceremonies that culminate Draupadī festivals. And it is also no coincidence that it is through images of fire that the goddess is invoked in her cosmic and most salvific forms. But these points require more far-reaching development. Let us try to keep our introductions down to earth by looking further into Draupadī's residence in Gingee, and the concentration of her cult in the Gingee area.

2

The Draupadī Cult: Its Historical and Regional Settings

It is probably not possible to pinpoint the origins of the Draupadī cult. It seems likely that certain early factors, probably originally disparate, played into its formation. The *Mahābhārata*, already popular and well integrated into Tamil traditions by the time of the “epic” Tamil poem, the *Cilappatikāram* (ca. A.D. 400–600),¹ seems to have gained considerable recognition during the period of the Pallavas (ca. A.D. 560–912), who ruled from the same Toṇṭaimaṇṭalam area of northern Tamilnadu—the Chingleput, and North and South Arcot Districts—that the Draupadī cult is centered in today. There are even Pallava cave temples, cut from rock probably at the time of Mahendravarman or Narisimhavarman (A.D. 580–688), at both Mēlaccēri and nearby Singavaram, the latter a regionally prominent temple housing images of Viṣṇu-Raṅganātha and Durgā.² It is the Pallavas who built the port of Mahabalipuram (or Mamallapuram) and sponsored the sculptures and monuments there, which South Indian popular traditions have persisted in identifying with *Mahābhārata* scenes and characters. In at least one case—the great rock face panel “Arjuna’s Penance” (from the time of Narasimhavarman, A.D. 630–88)—it seems quite likely that the identification is correct.³ If so, it depicts the epic episode in which Arjuna

1. There is inscriptional and literary evidence of a *Pāratam*—that is, a Tamil version of the *Mahābhārata*—by a certain Peruntēvaṇār in the Caṅkam period of the early Pandyas in Madurai; Shulman (personal communication) suggests a date of about A.D. 300.

2. See Srinivasan 1964, 112–18; Jouveau-Dubreuil 1916, 1:65–67: The Mēlaccēri Śiva temple is called Śikhari-Pallaveśvaram or Maṭṭilēśvara Kōyil. See below, chaps. 4, 5, and appendix 2.

3. Nagaraja Rao (1979, 84, 92–93), Ramachandran (1950–51, 58–59), Temple, Gopalan, and Krishnaswami Aiyangar (1929, 13, 20–21), and Peterson (1986b, n. 17) are all opposed to the view of Jouveau-Dubreuil (1916, 1: 64) and Zimmer (1946, 114–18) that the scene depicts “Bhagīratha’s Penance” and the descent of the Ganges. I should add that Michael Meister and Peterson (personal communications) think both myths may be evoked.

obtains from Śiva the Pāśupata weapon, the one weapon that the Pāṇḍavas require for victory in the *Mahābhārata* war.

In fact, these early Pallavas are linked with a tradition, apparently untraceable to any early documentation but interesting nonetheless, that popular recitation of the *Mahābhārata* was begun during the period of conflicts (ca. A.D. 620) between Mahendravarman (580–630) and Pulakesin II (609/610–42), the Chalukyan invader from Badami. Mahendravarman is said to have initially concentrated all his energies on temple building and other peaceful arts (music, drama, poetry). When his army was defeated by Pulakesin's, however, he waited until Pulakesin returned from a further southern campaign against the Pandyas, and attacked his tired army on its way back to Badami. Each king claimed this second battle a victory. Henceforth, however, Mahendravarman realized that patronage of the peaceful arts was not enough to secure his kingdom, and he sought to instill a martial spirit by sponsoring recitation of the *Mahābhārata*'s eighteen-day war.⁴ It was in any case Mahendravarman's son and successor, Narasimhavarman I Mahāmalla, who repulsed a second invasion by Pulakesin, and who at last succeeded in reversing the fortunes of the two kingdoms by conquering Badami (ca. 643). It is Narasimhavarman who developed Mahabalipuram as a port and patronized many of its great works of art, including the aforementioned "Arjuna's Penance."

Whether or not one can trace popular recitation of the *Mahābhārata* to this period, or to the encouragement of martial intentions, it is not long after this that recitation patterns and practices were definitely developed. The copper plates of Parameshvaravarman I Pallava (670–700) from Kuṛam, a village near Kanchipuram, record that one share of the donation to a local village assembly hall (*maṇḍapa*) was to go "to the reading of *Pāratam*" (*pāratam vācippatarku*).⁵ And it was during the reign of Nandivarman III Pallava (846–69) that a Tamil rendition of the *Mahābhārata* was composed by Peruntēvaṇār (a different person from the Peruntēvaṇār mentioned in note 1). Today's practice of reciting the epic at Draupadī temples—as well as at temples of certain other deities⁶—certainly owes something to these early developments.

4. My source for this unconfirmed story, who urged me to forget it, will remain unnamed. It is perhaps a piece of academic folklore.

5. Kācinātaṇ and Tāmōtaraṇ 1980, 4; cf. Raghavan 1959, 131, and Zvelebil 1974, 168. The Kuṛam copper plate, from near Kanchipuram, records that at the time of Parameshvaravarman I (ca. 670–700), provisions were made for the reading and exposition of the *Mahābhārata* (*bhāratākyaḥāna*, *bhārata-vṛtti*) at a local *maṇḍapa*.

6. For example, at Kūttāṇṭavar festivals (see below, chap. 15) and at the Cāmuṇṭicuvāri festival at Devichettikuppam, Vellore Taluk, North Arcot District (Nambiar and Karup, 1968, 207).

Only a portion of this second Peruntēvaṇār's *Pāratam* survives. But it holds numerous affinities to the tenth-century Kannaḍa *Bhāratam* or *Vikramārjuna Vijaya* of Pampa. In some cases the connections suggest Peruntēvaṇār's direct influence upon Pampa, and in other cases common folk sources for both (Jagannathachariar 1981, vi-xiii; Venkatesa Acharya 1981, 307–8, 319, 329–31). Thus where Peruntēvaṇār's text is now lost, Pampa presents possibilities for tracing the antiquity of certain common South Indian folk epic themes. This holds implications for the Draupadī cult's understanding of the *Mahābhārata*, for the Tamil version of the epic that the Draupadī cult favors—the *Makāpāratam* of Villiputtūr Ālvār, probably from the late fourteenth century (Thompson 1960, 118–19; Zvelebil 1974, 214; Shulman 1985, 13–14)—shares uniquely some of the “novel,” non-Sanskritic material found in these two earlier texts. From what survives of Peruntēvaṇār's *Pāratam*, it is evident that Villiputtūr drew upon him. And it is thus likely that in certain cases—few as they are—where Villi is tellingly close to Pampa, that the latter was also close to what is lost from Peruntēvaṇār. Nevertheless, the links between the two Tamil texts are far closer than those between either of them separately and Pampa. We shall see that Peruntēvaṇār's *Pāratam* synthesizes a distinctive Tamil understanding of the *Mahābhārata* that provides the model for Villiputtūr's “enrichments,” and those by other Tamil poets and playwrights who follow Villi. In this connection, it is noteworthy that Peruntēvaṇār already registers features of the distinctive Tamil mythology of Arjuna's son Aravāṇ (see Venkatesa Acharya 1981, 137–44). This hero is not only prominent in the Draupadī cult but has an epic-related cult of his own, one that, despite its geographical overlap with the Draupadī cult, is only loosely connected with it. Thus even though portions of Peruntēvaṇār's *Pāratam* may reflect, or foreshadow, the cult of Aravāṇ (see below, chap. 15), the history of this cult—even if it goes back to the Pallava period—would not guarantee a corresponding antiquity for the cult of Draupadī.

Similarly, the intriguing occurrences of *pōttarācar* or *pōttarāyan* as a title by some of the late Pallava rulers (859–903) are almost certainly unconnected with any early form of the Draupadī cult.⁷ Al-

7. Narasimhavarman, mentioned above, was also known “in later times” as Vātāpi koṇṭa Naraciṅka-pōttarāyan, “Narasimha the Pōttarāyan who took Vātāpi (Badami)”; see Thurston and Rangachari 1904, 6:5. Nilakanta Sastri (1966, 159) mention a Telugu-Chola ruler Śrīkaṇṭha “of the Pottappi family” who “was apparently collaborating with the Pandyas against the Pallavas.” Pottappi is a variant of this name, and provides significant indication that it had currency in Andhra during the Pallava period. Shulman also informs me of a region called Pottappi Nāṭu, north of Kalahasti in Andhra, that is mentioned by Cekkīlār in *Periya Purāṇam* 650. On Pōttu Rāja's connections with Andhra, see below, chap. 5, sec. B, and chap. 16.

though it is the same name as Pōttu Rāja, the "Buffalo King" who will figure so prominently in this study as Draupadī's chief guardian, it is uncertain how this name was used during the Pallava period.⁸ Minakshi favors "sprout" as a meaning for *pōttu* in the Pallava title, but adds: "The word *pōttu* has indeed another meaning, the bull, quite appropriate to designate these monarchs" (Minakshi 1938, 11). But more significantly, even if one suspects that the Pallava use of this title anticipates later uses in connecting the name with the worship of the goddess, there is no reason to suppose that the goddess in question would be Draupadī. As we shall see, as the servant of many different goddesses, Pōttu Rāja is ultimately the devotee of Durgā: a goddess whose widely recognized prominence in Pallava art has already been alluded to in the case of Singavaram (see Vogel 1930–32; Seshadri 1963, 15–19; Harle 1963).

The Pallava period thus supplies a surprising number of elements that either contribute to or provide background for the Draupadī cult.⁹ But one finds nothing to indicate that these factors were integrated into anything that resembles the Draupadī cult of today. This does not, of course, rule out the possibility of Pallava period origins. No doubt during this time there was a deepening of the associations between Draupadī and the goddess. Indeed, it is in this period (ca. 675–725) that Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇa composes his *Veṇiśaṃhāra*, the Sanskrit drama that provides the first clear literary unfolding of the theme that Draupadī will not bind up her hair until she can do so with the blood of her defilers (see Hildebeitel 1981, 179–86). Though written in North India, it is likely that this drama was popular also in the South, and particularly at the Pallava capital of Kanchipuram.¹⁰ One thus has an intriguing list of ingredients, but nothing to indicate a cult as such.

8. On the etymology of the name, see Biardeau and Malamoud 1976, 151; Biardeau 1981a, 235; Shulman 1976, 129; and Hildebeitel 1982b, 84–85. Burrow and Emeneau (1961, 302) show "male buffalo" for *pōttu*, *pōta*, etc., only in Telugu and Malayalam, and give "he-goat" in Kannada and "male of animals" in Tamil (and some other Dravidian languages). But from the accounts of various ethnographers, it would seem that at the popular level the "buffalo" meaning has been understood far more widely, from Tamilnadu (Francis 1906, 99) to Maharashtra (Sontheimer 1976, 60; Vetschera 1976, 457–65; Robertson 1938, 68). Cf. also Ziegenbalg 1869, 137 ("Bull King"). As we shall see in chapter 17, despite the linguistic opacity of *pōttu* in Tamil, the "buffalo" meaning surfaces inescapably in Pōttu Rāja's Draupadī cult mythology.

9. A tenth-century inscription also traces the Pallava genealogy back to the epic hero Aśvatthāman through a Nāga princess; see Krishnaswamy Aiyangar 1914–15, 83.

10. As insisted by C. Jagannathachariar, Retired Professor of Tamil, Vivekananda College, Madras.

A. The History of Gingee

For evidence of a cult, and for motivations for its consolidation, one must look past the Pallavas toward the period of instability in the thirteenth century that marks the disruption of Chola rule by the Pandyas (1264) and, soon after this, the irruption of militant Islam into the South Indian political and religious spectrum. It is during this period that the Gingee area seems to have gained its first measure of regional autonomy and identity under the Kōṇ dynasty, a line of "shepherd" (*kōṇār*) kings (ca. 1190–1330) whose descendants, as we shall see, have sometimes proclaimed their royal ancestors not only as the builders of the early fortifications at the Gingee Fort and Mēlaccēri, but as the first kings to sponsor construction at the Mēlaccēri Draupadī temple. Gingee was thus a fortified regional kingdom when Islamic forces from the north first impinged on the area in about 1311.

These considerations form part of a double hypothesis that I will now begin to develop. The Draupadī cult has a most curious Islamic component, which would seem to be unintelligible without positing an encounter with Islam in its militant form. This is the figure of Muttāl Rāvuttan, one of Draupadī's two guardian devotees, the other being the aforementioned Pōttu Rāja. Though Islamic traders were known on both coasts of South India as early as the ninth century, it is not until the fourteenth century that South India encounters the militant dimension of Islam that the figure of Muttāl Rāvuttan would seem to reflect. My first hypothesis is thus that the Draupadī cult was probably consolidated during the fourteenth century: indeed, more specifically, during the interval that begins with the militant incursions of Islam and ends in the late fourteenth century with the composition of Villiputtūr Ālvār's Tamil version of the *Mahābhārata*.¹¹ The latter is a work that not only has come to be recited at Draupadī festivals, but seems to show familiarity with certain Draupadī cult themes. My second hypothesis is that it is specifically in the Gingee area that the Draupadī cult was consolidated in this period, and that it is from Gingee country that it diffused outward, for varying reasons, in succeeding centuries.

11. Frasca also proposes fourteenth-century beginnings, but by a convergence of two in part questionable strains: (1) local goddess worship, not clearly differentiated by him from a pre-Vijayanagar Pattiṇi cult; and (2) Vaiṣṇava devotionism, through the Vijayanagar dynasty's "close links with the *Mahābhārata*" (1984, 134, 169, 272, 338). In my view, too much is made here of links between the Pattiṇi cult and a presumed primal Dravidian Amman ("Mother Goddess") cult (ibid., 45–46, 88–89, 96, 149, 173, 322; and see below, chap. 7, sec. B). The *Mahābhārata* has pre-Vijayanagar popularity in Toṇṭaimaṇṭalam; it is never simply a Vaiṣṇava work.

With these hypotheses in mind, let us examine the history of Gingee. Unfortunately, since it is as wild and colorful as the place itself, I can only mention those moments that bear directly on our subject, leaving an outline in appendix 2 to fill in the background that links Gingee with the major currents of South and pan-Indian history. Our information comes from a variety of sources, many of which have been drawn upon in the one major study of Gingee's history (Srinivasachari 1943).¹² But it must be emphasized that the main primary source for a connected history of Gingee is not Srinivasachari's book, but one of the Mackenzie manuscripts, the invaluable collection of transcribed texts assembled by the indefatigable Colin Mackenzie between 1795 and 1810 (see Srinivasachari 1943, 67–68). The manuscript in question is the *Karnāṭaka Rājākkaḷ Cavistāra Carittiram* ("The Detailed History of the Kings of the Carnatic") by Nārāyaṇaṇ Piḷḷai,¹³ an author who traces his own descent from the early Kōṇ rulers of Gingee. The most important section of this manuscript, composed at the special request of Colonel William Macleod in 1802–3 while Lord W. Bentinck was governor of Madras (1803–7), is the chapter called *Ceñciyiṇ Varalāru*, "The History of Gingee." As a Kōṇār from Gingee, claiming descent from the founding Kōṇs (or Kōṇārs), Nārāyaṇaṇ Piḷḷai was not only a recognized authority on regional historical traditions, but a man deeply imbued with the area's local mythology and folklore. The name he used for his chapter on Gingee is still used today in the shorter form *Ceñci Varalāru* as the title for oral histories of Gingee. It may be said that both Nārāyaṇaṇ Piḷḷai and today's storytellers draw on the same stock of material, the former seeking to draw out the historical thread, the latter continuing to harvest the mythical riches of which Nārāyaṇaṇ Piḷḷai was also clearly well aware.

For our purposes, it will prove helpful to relate the precolonial history of Gingee in terms of three main moments. The founding of the Kōṇ dynasty provides the first of these, launching Gingee's history as a fortified "royal" center.¹⁴ Thus the first king, Ānanta

12. Cf. also Orme 1768, 1: 154–55 (map); 1805; *Manual of the Madras Presidency* 1873, 393–94; Garstin 1878, 6–13; Eastwick 1879, 167–169; Heras 1926; Edwardes 1926; Krishnaswami Aiyangar 1921, 1930; Baliga 1962, 31–95; Satyanatha Aiyar 1980; Nilakanta Sastri 1966; Krishnaswami 1964; Jagadisa Ayyar 1982a, 180–89; Thompson 1960.

13. The work is edited by V. R. Ramachandra Dikshitar (Dikshitar 1952) and translated into French (Diagou 1939).

14. Suggestions that the earliest fortifications go back to some point in fifteen centuries of Chola rule (ca. 300 B.C.–A.D. 1250) have been offered only without evidence (Toy 1957, 11; Begde 1982, 212).

Kōṇ, begins his rule about 1190 and gives his name to the main rock fort, the Ānadagiri, also known as the Rājagiri ("King's Mountain") or Rājakōṭṭai ("King's Fort"); and his successor Krishna Kōṇ, ruling from about 1240, is said to have fortified the Krishnagiri, also known as the "Queen's Fort." The end of this dynasty then coincides with the first Muslim raids into the area, soon followed by the rise of the Vijayanagar empire (1330–1653), into whose long history Gingee comes to be closely entangled. Coming under Vijayanagar sway as early as 1382, and consolidated as the northernmost of the three Tamil Nāyakates (viceroyalties) during the robust imperial reign of Krishnadeva Rāya (1509–29), Gingee found its most vigorous ruler in the person of Tubākki Krishnappa Nāyakar (Tuppākki Kuruṣappa in the Mackenzie manuscript).

Tubākki's reign (1509–21) marks the second moment on our skein. Apparently delegated to be the founder of the Nāyak line of "kings," Tubākki ruled over a realm that extended from the town of Nellore in the north to the Coleroon River in the south. Within eighty years of his succession, however, Nāyak rule at Gingee had become increasingly entangled in rivalries between the declining empire, its other Nāyakates, and Portuguese, Dutch, British, and Muslim forces (Golconda, Bijapur). And when the Gingee Nāyakate came to its practical end in 1648 with the first fall of the fort to a Golconda-Bijapur coalition, Gingee came into further entanglements with the British, French, and Marathas (who captured the fort under Śivāji in 1677), and finally the Mughals (who took the fort from the Marathas in 1697 after a seven-year siege).

This brings us to the third key moment in the history of Gingee. After Gingee became a *killēdāri* subordinate regionally to the nawab of Arcot, the "Governor of the Carnatic" under the Mughals, it fell by appointment from the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb to Sarūp Singh, a Rajput Bundela chieftain (from Bundelkhand in northern Madhya Pradesh) who had served in the victorious Mughal siege force. As *killēdār* (governor) of Gingee, Sarūp Singh exercised control over the major towns of South Arcot (Tirukoyilur, Tindivanam, Valatāvūr, etc.), and harassed the British. His *jāgīr* (titled land) was probably at Mēlaccēri. After Aurangzeb's death in 1707, Sarūp Singh refused to pay tribute to the nawab of Arcot: a show of independence contemporary with Maratha, Rajput, Jat, and Sikh uprisings elsewhere upon the accession of Bahadur Shah as Aurangzeb's successor. It is during this latter impasse, upon Sarūp Singh's death, that Gingee came to be "ruled" for a brief ten months by Sarūp Singh's son Rāja Desing (Tēciṅku Rājan), the ballad hero. Consistently portrayed as an impetuous youth of hot temper, Desing

succeeded his father without confirmation from the emperor or from Sādatullah Khān, the refined and patient nawab. Desing met the nawab's secretary at Mēlaccēri and refused to pay up his father's arrears. With Gingee then under siege by an overwhelming force, he and his most loyal ally, the young Muslim Mohabbat Khān (Mōvuttukkāraṇ of the ballad) from Vaḷatāvūr, rode out to battle leading a hopelessly small force, and fought heroically to their doom (3 October 1714).

After this last resurgence of regional, royal, and indeed both Hindu and Muslim self-assertion at Gingee, the rest is the history of an eclipse. Twice I have heard Draupadī cult informants voice the proud but rueful sentiment that what was once Gingee is now Madras. The remainder of the eighteenth century saw Gingee reduced to a pawn in the rivalries between near and distant powers, while the area itself suffered hard taxation, impoverishment, and desertion of villages. Let us just add that thanks to a brief visit by Heras in 1924, we know that Bundela Rajput descendants of Desing continued to claim title as Jāgīrdars of the Gingee area's seven taluks throughout the eighteenth century, with a palace "in the middle of the present village of Mēlachēri." The last of this line, Sūrabanāden Singh, "owing to financial troubles, mortgaged the palace grounds to the Catholic Mission at the end of the 19th century." The parish record shows he was baptised in 1896 at age forty-five, even while identifying himself ■ Kṣatriya and "King of Jinji." He was found dead in the road the morning after a terrible cyclone on 22 December 1916, leaving behind his second daughter, abandoned by her husband and childless, who still lived in Mēlaccēri "in a pitiable condition" in April 1924 (Heras 1926, 42).

This history is filled with implications for our discussion of the Draupadī cult. The five-hundred-year span between 1300 and 1800 is crucial to my hypothesis concerning the cult's consolidation and diffusion. One can now be more precise about the constitutive period at the cult's beginning, and about the later evidence for its diffusion. In the early fourteenth century, the Gingee area, under its first "little kingdom," became a sort of "shatter zone" (Cohn 1966, 12; Eaton 1978, 4–5) between the competing forces of distant and surrounding realms. Such a context probably stands behind the fostering of traditions about the Kōṇ rulers of Gingee, who passed into the memories that are retained in Draupadī cult and other regional legends that we shall discuss in chapters 4 and 5.¹⁵

15. Cf. Schomer's discussion of the North Indian folk epic, the *Ālha*, which projects a heroic age of Rajput heroes at "the end of the twelfth century A.D., on the eve of the Turkish conquest of North India" (1984, 2).

The end of the Kōṇ dynasty is also marked by the early Muslim incursions that I have suggested may be linked with the cult's image of Muttāl Rāvuttan. He can be seen as a reflection of the new regional consciousness on Islamic militance and its challenge to the "little kingdom" ideal that the Draupadī cult espouses. Moreover, the rise of Vijayanagar and the end of Hoysala rule in Karnataka (ca. 1344), with the apparent dispersal of Hoysala arts and myths into the wider Vijayanagar areas, is preceded during the last Hoysala years by Hoysala contacts in the Gingee area (see appendix 2, dates 1340–42). This convergence is highly suggestive for the shaping of the Draupadī cult, for it is in Hoysala art that one finds the earliest sculptures of several of the cult's central themes: most notably the depictions of Arjuna winning Draupadī as his bride by shooting an arrow at a fish, and of Draupadī fulfilling her vow to dress her hair on the battlefield with the blood of Duḥśāsana (see plates 3 and 4).¹⁶ Similarly, around 1335 (see appendix 2) Gajapati kings of Kalinga undertook raids into South Arcot, a fact that may give some coloring to the significance given "Kalinga" in one of our myths of Pōttu Rāja. Add to this that by about 1400, we have the Tamil *Mahābhārata* of Villiputtūr Ālvār, which seems to reflect Draupadī cult themes and which comes to be used at Draupadī festivals. And the Draupadī cult appears to have the main ingredients to begin its history in Gingee.

As to the diffusion of the cult, different factors may now be identified. In the sixteenth century heyday of Nāyak rule, and perhaps already in the fifteenth century, the dispersal of the cult would be tied in with population movements and religious currents in a newly revitalized area. Indeed, I will cite reasons to suspect that most of the diffusion during this period would have taken

16. See below, chap. 9, sec. C; chap. 11, sec. A; and chap. 18, sec. B: in her cult Draupadī's vow is usually to dress her hair with the blood from Duryodhana's thigh, but the Duḥśāsana variant is known (as at Pūṇamalli). Both scenes also appear to have earlier Kannada textual foundation in the tenth-century *Bhārata* or *Vikramārjuna Vijaya* of Pampa (see Sitaramiah 1967, 146, on the "fish target"; and see *ibid.*, 75, 95–96, 126; Venkatesa Acharya 1981, 293, esp. 360–61, on the scene with Duḥśāsana). The fish scene is depicted on outer walls of the Chennakeśava Temple at Belur (where the arrow approaches the fish's eye) and the Hoysalesvara Temple at Halebid (Dorasamudra; see plate 3), as well as at other Hoysala sites in Karnataka (Bucheśvara Temple, Koravangala; Lakṣmī Narasiṃha Temple, Naggihalli; Viṣṇu Chennakeśava Temple, Haranahalli, all in Hassan District; Kedareśvara Temple, Nagalapura, Tumkur District: information from photograph catalog at French Institute of Indology, Pondicherry). It later occurs in a Nāyak-period sculpture at the Śrī Aḷakiya Nampirāyar Temple, Tirukaraṅkūti, Nanguneri Taluk, Tirunelveli District, Tamilnadu (Nambiar et al. 1968c, 408ff., pl.).

place within the larger realm of the kingdom of Gingee: the area from Nellore (or Tirupati) to the Coleroon.

But with the end of Nāyak rule in 1648, the dynamics of diffusion would have drastically changed. The area returns to being a "shatter zone," and one of the most staggering and remorseless proportions. A Jesuit missionary, Father Proenza, describes Gingee in 1659 as having been, under the Nāyaks, the richest of all the Nāyak realms for plunder (Satyanatha Aiyar [1924] 1980, 200). Soon after this, a letter of André Freire of the Jesuit mission to Madurai, written in 1666, describes current conditions at Gingee under Bijapuri rule:

Nothing can equal the cruelties which the Muhammadans employ in the government of Gingi; expression fails me to recount the atrocities which I have seen with my own eyes; and if I were to describe them, truth would be incredible. To the present horror are added the fears of what is to happen; for it is announced that Idal Khān sends a strong army to raise the contributions, which the Nāyaks had promised, by force. (Satyanatha Aiyar [1924] 1980, 211; cf. 212–13)

Beyond these unnamed horrors, it is a period of hardship and famine, with a large influx of Muslims into the area and marked efforts to intensify the spread of Islam (Srinivasachari 1943, 184, 207). Yet if anything, conditions worsened under the Marathas. With their popular and political base in Maharashtra, the Gingee Fort was for them only a redoubt against the Mughals, and not the center of a kingdom. André Freire writes in 1678 from Viranam "in the kingdom of Gingi" (probably Viraṇam, Tiruvannamalai Taluk, North Arcot) that Śivāji, after exhausting his treasury extending Gingee's fortifications, had

compensated himself by universal pillage in the country, whose riches were hoarded in the citadels. His orders were carried out with such rigour and barbarity that most of the inhabitants sought safety in exile. Those who would not leave their homes are still groaning under this iron yoke, which makes them forget all past evils, and sighing for the arrival of the Moghuls. (Satyanatha Aiyar [1924] 1980, 215; cf. 219–21: while the Mughals held the Marathas under siege, both sides ravaged the countryside; cf. also Orme 1805, 160–61)

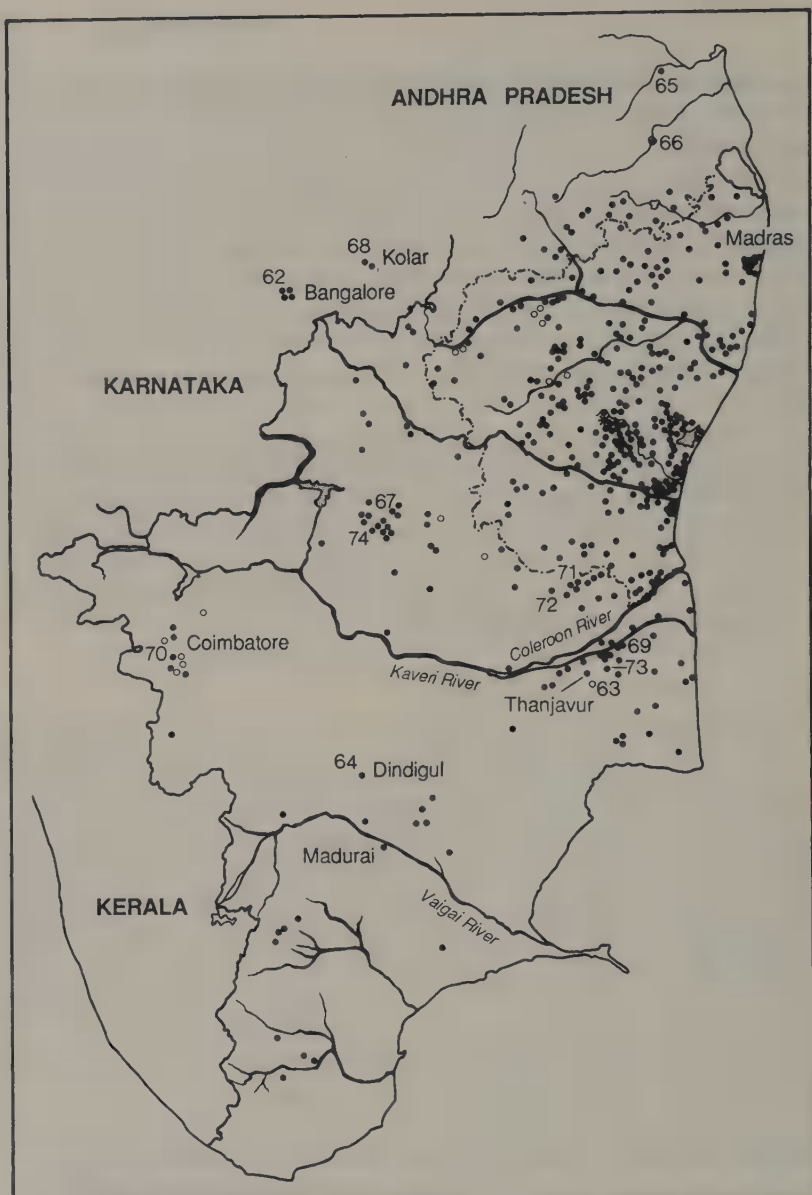
Thus the harsh taxation, impoverishment, and desertion of villages that took place in the turmoil of the eighteenth century only continued the miseries that had befallen the area beginning with

the first fall of Gingee in 1648. It is natural to suppose that it is this period that marked not only the depopulation of the villages of the Gingee area, but the most heightened diffusion of the Draupadī cult away from those villages, sometimes into other towns and villages within the Gingee area, but more often into newer population centers in this central region, and especially beyond it. The process of dispersal was then clearly carried further under British and French colonial influences, with the transmission of the Draupadī cult through Tamil laborers into such far-flung places as Fiji, Singapore, Malaysia, and Reunion Island (see Brown 1976, 1984; Babb 1974; Blaive, Penaud, and Nicoli 1974). The 1893 *Manual of Administration of the Madras Presidency* (3:393) records the population of Gingee in that year at the stark figure of 493 persons. Three hundred years earlier, in 1597, the Portuguese Jesuit missionary Father Pimenta, hosted at Gingee by Krishnappa Nāyak, had called Gingee—which then extended to include Mēlaccēri—the “Troy of the East,” and “the greatest city we have seen in India” (Srinivasachari 1943, 15, 95–96).

B. The Core Area

I will return to Gingee's history in my treatment of the area's mythology. But for now let me refine my hypothesis on the diffusion of the Draupadī cult by moving from the dimension of time to that of space. As one can see from map 1, the greatest concentration of Draupadī temples is found in the area once dominated by the Nāyaks of Gingee. The data is by no means complete. The map registers for the most part the Draupadī and Dharmarāja temples (both names are used within the one cult) mentioned in the 1961 Census of India volumes on temples and fairs and festivals of Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh.¹⁷ These sources supply no information about Pondicherry and Pudukottai states, both of which include areas within Tamilnadu but under separate administrations. The part of Pondicherry State that surrounds the city of Pondicherry is embraced by South Arcot, well within the Draupadī cult's main area. The map records four temples there that were located in my fieldwork. Similarly, other temples that were found through fieldwork or learned about through written or oral sources outside the Census publications are also indicated—including a few temples within the state of Karnataka (Bangalore, Kolar). The map

17. See Nambiar et al. 1966, 1968a, 1968b, 1968c, 1969; Nambiar and Karup 1968; Chandra Sekhar 1961a–e, 1963.



- Draupadi Temples
- Other Sites (mostly Kūttāṇṭavar Temples)
For Numbered Sites, see Table 2.
- - - Boundary of Core Area Sites within Tamilnadu as represented in Map 2.
- State Boundaries

Map 1. Distribution of Draupadi Temples and Related Sites in South India

thus records all the Draupadī temples known to me up to 1984 in Tamilnadu, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh.

A breakdown of the number of temples by district in these states is given in table 1. I have no meaningful statistics on Draupadī temples in Karnataka. Worshipers at one of the Draupadī temples in Bangalore were familiar with others in regional villages. But it is likely that the dispersal of temples in Karnataka is limited to areas bordering on northwestern Tamilnadu, just as in Andhra the only Draupadī temples recorded in the 1961 Census volumes are in the two districts—Chittoor and Nellore—that border northeastern Tamilnadu.

It is obvious that the total figures are skewed by the fact that the majority of additional temples were found within my primary fieldwork area (Chingleput, the Arcots, Madras, and Pondicherry). But even without the additions, the figures drawn from the Census publications are sufficient to indicate not only the area but something of the proportions of the cult's concentration. Of the 349

Table 1. Draupadī Temples by District

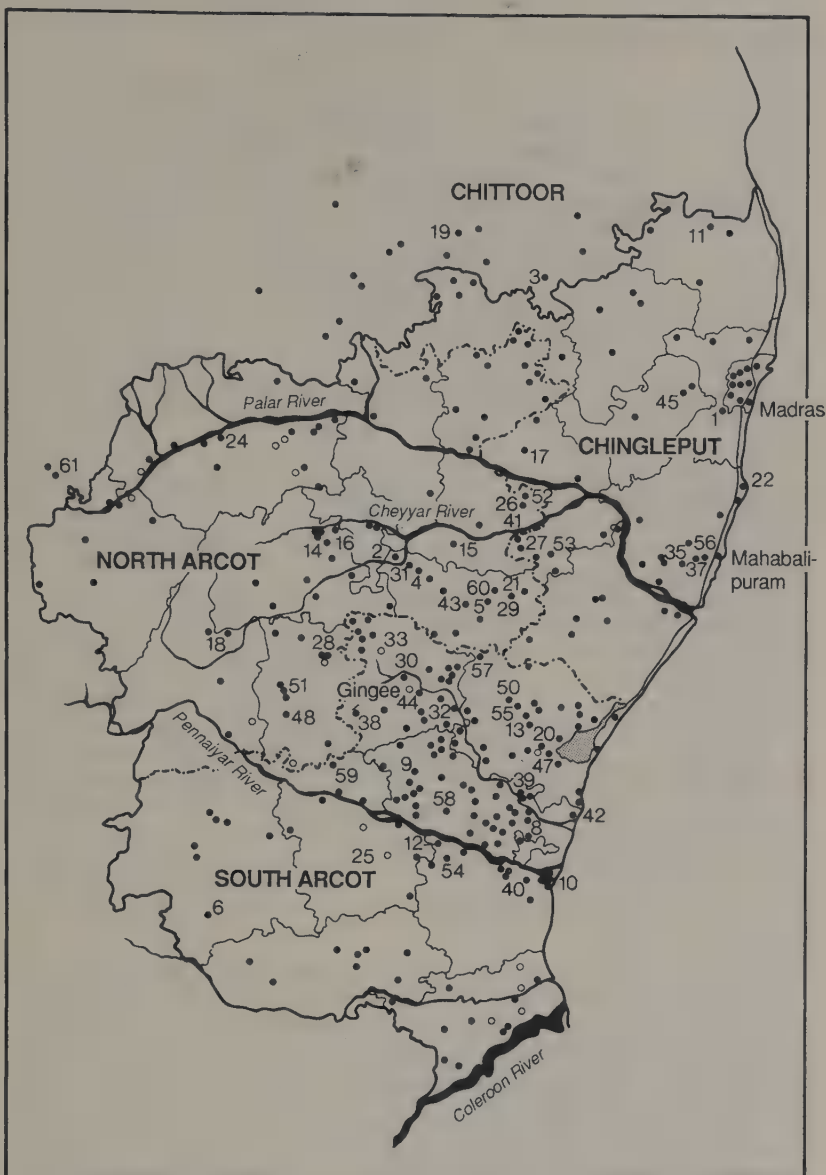
	Census Sources	Fieldwork and Other Sources	Total
Karnataka			
Bangalore and Kolar Districts	0	6	6
Andhra Pradesh			
Nellore District	1	0	1
Chittoor District	17	1	18
Tamilnadu			
Chingleput District	30	14	44
Madras City	10	0	10
North Arcot District	69	11	80
South Arcot District	127	18	145
Pondicherry and environs	0	4	4
Salem and Dharmapuri Districts	31	1	32
Thanjavur District	24	2	26
Tiruchirappalli District	17	1	18
Madurai District	7	0	7
Coimbatore District	7	0	7
Ramanathapuram District	6	0	6
Tirunelveli District	3	1	4
Kanyakumari and Nilgiri Districts	0	0	0
Totals	349	59	408

temples mentioned in these sources, 236, or 67 percent, are found in the Arcots and Chingleput (including Madras) District. This total would be slightly larger if figures from Pondicherry could be added. The surrounding districts of Nellore, Chittoor, Dharmapuri, Salem, Tiruchirapalli, and Thanjavur then account for 90 recorded temples, or 26 percent of the total, while the more distant southern and western districts of Tamilnadu account for the remaining 7 percent.

The additional numbers drawn from fieldwork make it obvious that the Census totals can do no more than indicate a proximate ratio of concentration. Many of the sites that are most crucial to this study—Mēlaccēri, Tindivanam, Maṅkaḷam, Veḷḷimēṭupēṭṭai, Mutikai Nallāṅkuppam—are not listed in either the *Festivals* or *Temples* volumes. Moreover, one can get some idea of the degree to which the Census figures are short of any true total. In "Reports on the Swinging Festival, and the Ceremony of Walking through Fire," the results of a survey ordered in 1854 by the British government in Madras, E. Maltby, then the chief magistrate of South Arcot, indicated that there were 489 "Dhurmah Rajah" temples in his district alone (1854, 32). Similarly, Gustav Oppert (1893, 97) speaks of over 500 Draupadī temples in the same district. Some temples have no doubt fallen into disuse. Indeed, a number have discontinued their festivals since 1961. But most of these South Arcot Draupadī temples are probably still standing.

It may be further noted that the types of concentration displayed in map 1 differ in the three broad areas that spread out from north to south. In the first group of districts, the main area around the Arcots, the temples are widely dispersed and predominantly rural. In the second, there is still some rural dispersal, but a majority of temples are located in high population areas such as those around Chittoor and Puttur, Salem, Thanjavur, and the Kaveri Delta. Finally, in the third group there is little evidence of rural spread, and most of the temples are connected with larger towns or cities (Dindigul, Madurai, Coimbatore, Tirunelveli). I will return to these points, and their implications, shortly.

Map 2 allows us then to focus more closely on the central region of the Draupadī cult, and also to identify the locations of most of the sites visited in my fieldwork (see table 2). As one can see, the geographical center of this area—marked on the map by a circle—is Gingee. Moreover, the boundaries along the coastal stretch of this area of concentration are precisely those of the Gingee Nāyakate: from Tirupati or Nellore in the north (the Kalahasti and Gudur temples on map 1 are each within twenty-five miles of those



- Draupadi Temples
 - Other Sites (mostly Kūttāṇṭavar Temples)
- For Numbered Sites, see Table 2.

Map 2. Draupadi Temples and Related Sites in the Gingee Core Area

Table 2. Fieldwork and Other Cult-related Sites

Core Area Sites
1. *Ālantūr (Alundur), Saidapet Tk., Chingleput
2. *Anmarutai, Wandiwash Tk., N. A.
3. Attur, Satyavedu Tk., Chittoor (see Chandra Sekhar 1961d)
4. *Cantirampāṭi, Wandiwash Tk., N. A.
5. #Cempūr, Wandiwash Tk., N. A.
6. *Chinna Salem (Cinna Cēlam), Kallakuruchi Tk., S. A.
7. Chintadripet, Madras City (see Gopalakrishnan 1953)
8. *Cinnapāpucamuttiram, Villupuram Tk., S. A.
9. #Cīruvālai, Villupuram Tk., S. A.
10. *Cuddalore, Cuddalore Tk., S. A.
11. Cuṇṇāmpukuḷam, Ponneri Tk., Chingleput (see Moses 1961)
12. Ēṇātērimaṅkaḷam, Cuddalore Tk., S. A.
13. Entiyūr, Tindivanam Tk., S. A.
14. Iluppakuṇam, Polur Tk., N. A.
15. Iruṅkal, Cheyyar Tk., N. A. (see Frasca 1984)
16. *Kaḷampūr (= Alliabad), Polur Tk., N. A.
17. *Kanchipuram (Pañcipēṭṭai Hamlet), Kanchipuram Tk., Chingleput
18. #Kārappaṭṭu, Chengam Tk., N. A.
19. Kārvēṭinagaram, Puttur Tk., Chittoor (see Reddy 1985)
20. *Kīliyaṇūr, Tindivanam Tk., S. A.
21. #Kīlkoṭuṅkālūr, Wandiwash Tk., N. A.
22. *Kovalong, Chingleput Tk., Chingleput
23. *Krepauk, Madras City
24. Kūttampākkam, Vaniyampadi Tk., N. A. (see Biardeau, in press)
25. *Kūvākkam, Ulundurpet Tk., S. A. (Kūttāṇṭavar Temple)
26. *Māmaṇṭūr, Cheyyar Tk., N. A.
27. *Māṇāmpāṭi, Kanchipuram Tk., Chingleput
28. *Maṅkaḷam, Tiruvannamalai Tk., N. A.
29. *Marutāṭu, Wandiwash Tk., N. A.
30. *Mēlaccēri, Gingee Tk., S. A.
31. *Mēlcāttamaṅkaḷam, Wandiwash Tk., N. A.
32. #Mēlcēvūr, Gingee Tk., S. A.
33. Mēl Malaiyaṇūr, Gingee Tk., S. A. (Aṅkāḷammaṇ Temple; see Meyer 1984)
34. *Muthialpet, Madras City
35. *Mutikai Nallāṅkuppam, Chingleput Tk., Chingleput
36. *Mylapore, Madras City
37. *Nallāṅpetṭāl, Chingleput Tk., Chingleput
38. *Nallāṅpīḷlaiperrāl, Gingee Tk., S. A.
39. *Pakkiripāḷaiyam, Villupuram Tk., S. A.
40. *Pātirikkuppam, Cuddalore Tk., S. A.
41. *Perunakar, Kanchipuram Tk., Chingleput
42. *Pondicherry, Pondicherry State
43. #Ponṇūr, Wandiwash Tk., N. A.
44. *Ponṇatti, Gingee Tk., S. A.
45. *Pūṇamalli (Poonamallee), Sriperumbudur Tk., Chingleput
46. *Sowcarpet, Madras City
47. *Tailāpuram, Tindivanam Tk., S. A.
48. *Tēṇmāttūr, Tiruvannamalai Tk., N. A.

49. *Teynampet, Madras City
50. *Tindivanam, Tindavanam Tk., S. A.
51. *Tiruvannamalai, Tiruvannamalai Tk., N. A.
52. *Tūci, Cheyyar Tk., N. A.
53. *Uttirāmērūr, Kanchipuram Tk., Chingleput
54. Variñcippākkam, Cuddalore Tk., S. A. (*Pōrmannaṇ Caṇṭai* author's village)
55. Vaṭa Ālappākkam, Tindivanam Tk., S. A.
56. *Vaṭakaṭampāṭi, Chingleput Tk., Chingleput
57. *Vellimēṭupēṭṭai, Tindivanam Tk., S. A.
58. *Villupuram (Kilperumpākkam Hamlet), Villupuram Tk., S. A.
59. *Virapāṇṭi, Tirukoyilur Tk., S. A.
60. *Wandiwash (Vantavāci), Wandiwash Tk., N. A.
61. Yamaganipalle, Kuppam Tk., Chittoor (see Chandra Sekhar 1961d)

Sites Outside the Core Area

62. *Bangalore City (Karnataka; four temples)
63. Cūrakkōṭṭai, Thanjavur Tk., Thanjavur (Meyer, personal communication)
64. *Dindigul, Dindigul Tk., Madurai
65. Gudur, Gudur Tk., Nellore (see Chandra Sekhar 1961c)
66. *Kalahasti, Kalahasti Tk., Chittoor (see Chandra Sekhar 1961d)
67. Kijiyūr, Yercaud Tk., Salem (see Thurston and Rangachari 1904, 4: 412–14)
68. *Kolar, Kolar Tk., Kolar (Karnataka; two temples)
69. *Kumbhakonam, Kumbhakonam Tk., Thanjavur
70. #Kuṇiyamattūr, Coimbatore Tk., Coimbatore
71. #Maṇakuṭaiyaṇ, Udaiyarpalayam Tk., Tiruchirappalli
72. #Maṇappattūr, Ariyalur Tk., Tiruchirappalli
73. Papanasam, Papanasam Tk., Thanjavur (Meyer, personal communication)
74. *Salem, Salem Tk., Salem (two temples)

Note: TK. = Taluk; N. A. = North Arcot; S. A. = South Arcot.

*Sites visited in fieldwork.

#Sites on which information was obtained by mailed survey.

sites) to the Coleroon in the south.¹⁸ From east to west, one can see that numerous Draupadī temples tend, as one would expect, to have been built near settlements along the rivers that cross the area. What is significant, however, is that it is one of the smaller rivers, rarely shown in state maps of Tamilnadu, that runs through the most concentrated area of the cult. This river is the Varāhanadī or Caṅkarāparaṇi, and numerous Draupadī temples, including Draupadī's "temple of origins" at Mēlaccēri, are found in towns and villages that line its banks. It is shown on map 2 with its sources just west of Gingee and its mouths below Pondicherry (site 42). We shall return to this river in our discussion of the relationship between the Draupadī cult and the mythology of Gingee.

18. On these boundaries, see discussion above, and also chap. 5, sec. A, below.

I would thus argue that the traditional "Gingee country" is the Draupadī cult's "core area," with a mythic "temple of origins" at the town of Old Gingee, or Mēlaccēri. Residents of Mēlaccēri call the Draupadī temple there the goddess's *āti pīṭam*, her "primal shrine." The hypothesis has its risks, as will be noted in chapter 3. But its workability is enhanced by the similar findings of Meyer in her study of the sister cult of the goddess *Aṅkāḷamman*. This cult also has its core area around Gingee, and a "temple of origins" at Mēl Malaiyaṇūr (see map 2, site 33) in Gingee Taluk, no more than fifteen miles (ten as the crow flies) northwest of Gingee itself (Meyer 1984, 74, 103, 137–8, 157). Like the Draupadī cult, it too exhibits telling mythic and ritual variations outside of this core area. Indeed, there will be reasons to think that these two cults have influenced each other's mythologies. And since most of our interest will be in themes that show the Draupadī cult at the receiving end, it is worth citing one case where the situation is almost certainly reversed. According to a myth reported by Oppert (1893, 385–86),

Aṅgāramma [*Aṅkāḷamman*] was the daughter of a learned Brāhman in the Cōḷa country and had acquired such a superior knowledge that she put to shame the greatest Paṇḍits of her period. These men did not like to be worsted in arguments and discussion by a young girl, and in consequence conspired to disgrace her in public. For this purpose they presented her with a beautiful smooth cloth, which would, when put on her body, unawares slip from her waist, so that she would appear without any clothing before the assembly. Aṅgāramma accepted their present, and divining their intention, put on the dress in such a manner, that it could not slip. Thus attired, she entered the assembly, where she thoroughly discomfited her opponents, and outcasted those Brāhmans, who had attempted to dishonor her.

Clearly this *Aṅkāḷamman* myth—with its heroine's discomfiture of her learned opponents and would-be disrobers in an assembly, or *sabhā*—shows the influence of the epic mythology of Draupadī's disrobing. And it is further likely that it reflects the Draupadī cult's treatment of that scene, for as we shall see, one of the Kauravas' repeated suspicions is that Draupadī had also anticipated their attempt to disrobe her, and had devised some trick with her saree to prevent it. Thus one of the rewards of studying certain common features of these two cults, as well as other ritual and mythic traditions of the core area, will be a means to appreciate—for now, in terms of myth—Cohn's insight that a "historical region" like

that of Gingee maintains a "symbol pool" that "may be drawn upon and around which the idea of regionalism can be formed for a particular region" (1966, 22). Let us note, however, that *Aṅkāḷamman*'s cult, unlike *Draupadī*'s, has Telugu roots that are at least as ancient and as fully and differentially developed as its Tamil ones. The *Aṅkāḷamman* cult may thus be said to have other "core areas." As far as I have been able to discern, the *Draupadī* cult that has its core area around Gingee is not contiguous with any other *Draupadī* cult with such deep regional roots or variant yet consistent unfolding.¹⁹

19. On other *Draupadī* and *Pāṇḍava* "cults" in India not contiguous with the Tamil *Draupadī* cult, see chap. 7.

3

Social Background, Diffusion, Variation, and Change

The concentration of the Draupadī cult in the Gingee area has a number of implications. This chapter will look first at the cult's primary caste composition within the core area. Then it will examine the processes of variation and change as they bear upon the diffusion of the cult away from that area, looking especially at the singularly documented case of the Draupadī temple in Dindigul.

The Draupadī cult's clientele come from a number of castes, and it is usually the case that in principle no castes are excluded. Even Brahmans and Harijans sometimes take part in certain roles. But most of the participating castes (or subcastes) fall under the broad heading of Śūdras. Of these, I have found only three to control the main offices of Draupadī temples: Vaṇṇiyars, Vēḷāḷar Mutaliyārs, and Kōṇārs.¹ It is noteworthy that these three castes not only are ritually compatible, but, according to Thurston and Rangachari (1904, 2: 353), eat within each other's houses. There are also, however, traditions of rivalry between the Vēḷāḷars and Vaṇṇiyars.²

A. Vaṇṇiyars, Kōṇārs, and Vēḷāḷar Mutaliyārs

Although they are the smallest group of the three, the Kōṇārs (or Iṭaiyars) still hold a significant position in the cult. A shepherd

1. Frasca (1984, 28) indicates that Malaiyālis ("hill" people) also worship Draupadī in the North Arcot hills. No doubt they have their own temples and temple officiants. Thurston and Rangachari (1904, 4: 412–14) describe a Malaiyāli ceremony for Draupadī and Perumāḷ (Viṣṇu) at Kiliyūr in the Shevaroy Hills near Yercaud, but it is unclear whether it is part of a Draupadī festival as such. There is little to connect the ceremony with what we know of Draupadī festivals elsewhere; but more work on Malaiyāli Draupadī festivals is needed.

2. See Thurston and Rangachari 1904, 7: 369: here Vēḷāḷars refuse to eat with Vaṇṇiyars who claim to be Kṣatriyas! On other evidences of opposition between these two castes, see *ibid.* 6: 8; Stein 1980, 450; Mahalingam 1972, 94; Oppert 1893, 88.

caste, they claim Kṛṣṇa as one of their own and sometimes call themselves Yādavas ("descendants of Yadu," an ancestor of Kṛṣṇa himself). At certain places they sponsor features of Draupadī festivals that are connected with Kṛṣṇa, and their participation within the cult is at least in part a reflection of the prominence of Kṛṣṇa within it, and within the *Mahābhārata*. Of the three main castes involved, the Kōṇārs administer the smallest number of Draupadī temples (only three were found: one each at Kanchipuram, Bangalore, and Tēṇmāttūr near Tiruvannamalai). But their participation in the cult would seem to be very early. It is Ānanta Kōṇ, a member of this caste, who is said to have first fortified Gingee and Mēlaccēri and to have established the Kōṇ dynasty there. And it is Kōṇārs who claim descent from him and his royal line who have for centuries retained important ritual offices in Draupadī's temple of origins at Mēlaccēri. Indeed, as we shall see, some of their local legends attribute the founding of the Mēlaccēri temple to Ānanta Kōṇ himself.

The greatest involvement with the Draupadī cult, however, belongs by far to the Vāṇṇiyars, with the Vēlāḷar Mutaliyārs a distant second.³ Moreover, there is an important geographical correlation between the relative numerical prominence of these two castes and their ceremonial preeminence in Draupadī's temples. In South Arcot, where Vāṇṇiyars have the largest numbers of any caste, it is they who usually hold the main temple responsibilities. In North Arcot, however, where Vēlāḷar Mutaliyārs are predominant, the corresponding temple offices often belong to them (as also in adjacent areas of southern Chingleput District).⁴ But even in these areas, and outward into surrounding districts of Chittoor (Chandra Sekhar 1961d, 3, 28, 127, 143), Kolar, Bangalore, Salem, and Tiruchirappalli, it is still most common to find Vāṇṇiyars in the main temple and ceremonial offices.

3. On Vāṇṇiyar predominance, see Oppert 1893, 97–98; Francis 1906, 99 (Vāṇṇiyars act royal roles in dramas and carry the "firepot" in festivals); Thurston and Rangachari 1904, 6: 9–10; Richards 1910, 30; Gros and Nagaswamy 1970, 120; Moses et al. 1961, 84.

4. I rely on rather old figures for caste population statistics, as the Indian government no longer permits their recording. For South Arcot, the 1871 census showed Vāṇṇiyars the most populous caste, numbering 535,724, or 31 percent, of the 1,710,542 total; Vēlāḷars (next after "Pariahs") numbered 245,082 (see Garstin 1878, app., ii). In 1906 the Vāṇṇiyars, now 728,000 strong, still constituted nearly 30 percent of the total district population (Francis 1906, 103). The 1871 census figures for North Arcot were 577,892 Vēlāḷars and 269,520 Vāṇṇiyars out of a total of 1,927,225 (Cox 1881, 253–54). For more recent statistics on Vāṇṇiyars from the 1931 census, the last to enumerate caste, see Rudolph and Rudolph 1967, 50 and n. 28. Cf also Baliga 1962, 141–43.

In the South Indian context, which recognizes no "true" Kṣatriyas or Vaiśyas to fill out the social ranks between the Brahmans on top and the Śūdras and Harijans who comprise the mass of the population, all three of these Śūdra castes have traditions (some mythic, others probably historical) that lay claim to higher caste origins. Indeed, such traditions of demotion from a once higher rank are a commonplace of South Indian caste mythologies.⁵ In connection with the Draupadī cult, which clearly projects Kṣatriya values, the claims to Kṣatriya status and the related assumption of local "royal" prerogatives are of course the most significant. We have already noted that the Kōṇārs of Mēlaccēri connect their prominence in the Draupadī cult with the royal heritage that is said to descend upon them from the founders of the Kōṇ dynasty of Gingee.

As to the Vēlāḷar Mutaliyārs, their adoption of *sattvic* (clean) Brahmanical practices (e.g., vegetarianism) is aimed at bringing them recognition, not as Kṣatriyas, but as Vaiśyas. Thus although others persist in seeing them as Śūdras, they are often accorded the highest rank among the Śūdra castes, as Thurston and Rangachari (1904, 7: 373) observed with apparent reference to South Arcot. The Vēlāḷar caste as a whole, however, is found throughout Tamilnadu, and the Vēlāḷar Mutaliyārs are but one of its four main subdivisions. Their base is in the central area of ancient Pallava rule (Toṇṭaiṁaṇṭalam) that includes the Arcot and Chingleput District.

When one looks to Vēlāḷar traditions more generally, one finds considerable evidence for Kṣatriya affinities. In one legend of the origin of their caste, their ancestor is born with a plough and a royal diadem (*kiriṭam*). Though he loses the diadem and accepts that he and his descendants shall henceforth be ineligible for sovereignty, the five artisan castes agree to serve him as the protector of the earth. He also retains for the Vēlāḷars the right to crown the heads of kings (Thurston and Rangachari 1904, 7: 362–64, 367, 370). The subordination of the five artisan castes to the first Vēlāḷar finds a parallel in the Telugu folk epic known as the *Heroes of Palnāḍu* (Roghair 1982), in which the five artisan castes are symbolically subordinated to a Velama hero whose Kṣatriya affinities could not be more clear. The possibility raised by Thurston (Thurston and Rangachari 1904, 7: 368) of connections between the Vēlāḷars of Tamilnadu and the Velamas of Andhra should not be lightly dis-

5. Thurston cites at least twenty-one further instances of South Indian castes claiming original Kṣatriya rank; see, e.g., Thurston and Rangachari 1904, 1: 134–38, 211, 226, 230, 257–58; 2: 38, 103, 107, 320; 3: 94–95, 200, 223, 282, 296 (Koil Tampurans); 5: 128; 6: 192–93, 237, 242, 247–48, 365–67 (Cāṇārs); 7: 170.

missed. Moreover, the reservation of the right to crown the king probably reflects the Vēḷāḷars' widely found status (cf. Daniel, 1984, 95–101, 149–51) as a locally dominant caste: it would be as local lords, or “protectors of the earth,” that they reserve the right—while accepting their own subordination—to crown the regional king.⁶ There are numerous instances where Vēḷāḷars, as local dominants, take on royal and Kṣatriya prerogatives as village headmen, zamindars, and even local “kings” (Thurston and Rangachari 1904, 7: 368–69; Stein 1980, 213). Thus another Vēḷāḷar subgroup, the Koṇku Vēḷāḷars, foster a clear Kṣatriya and royal self-image as local dominants in the *Elder Brothers Story* (Beck 1982, 137–44), a folk epic from Kongunad (Salem and Coimbatore Districts).

There can be little doubt that such Kṣatriya affinities, tied in with locally dominant status or traditions of local rule, play an important part in the associations of Kōṇārs and Vēḷāḷar Mutaliyārs with the Draupadī cult. But it is especially among the Vaṇṇiyars, and particularly among the Vaṇṇiyars of South Arcot, that such associations become clear. Moreover, the Vaṇṇiyars' own traditions are so intimately compatible with major themes of the cult that it is impossible to resist the temptation to see them as the main caste in its founding inspiration, and to suspect that the other two have taken it up by adoption and imitation.

The Vaṇṇiyars derive their caste name from Sanskrit *vahni*, “fire” (see, e.g., Nayakar 1891, 14). *Vahni* itself is thought to yield the Tamil word *vaṇṇi*, “fire” (*Tamil Lexicon*, s.v.), which is also, as we shall see, the Tamil name of an important tree: the Sanskrit *śamī*. The term *vaṇṇi* is variously drawn upon in the caste's origin legends. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholars record variants of what seems to be a common tradition, which can be summarized as follows. The Vaṇṇiyars were born from the sacrificial fire of a primal sage named Śambhu (with the variants Campuva, Campuha, Jāmbava), a name that admits of numerous associations including Śambhu/Campu as a name for the god Śiva and the Cāmpuvarāyan kings, probably Vaṇṇiyars, who held sway over the Gingee area through much of the fourteenth century (see appendix 2).

6. The Kōṇārs, or Yādavas, also inherit a tradition of accepting a restriction that they cannot be kings. It was their mythical ancestor Yadu himself who was cursed by his father, Yayāti, that his descendants should have no share of kingship (*Mbh.* 1.79.5–10). Also analogous, it is Yadu's descendant Kṛṣṇa who becomes the *Mahābhārata*'s crowner of kings. The Yayāti story is well represented at Draupadī festivals by professionals who recite the epic in Tamil (see chap. 7, sec. A). Curiously, Thurston and Rangachari (1904, 2: 365) take the title Kōṇ/Kōṇār to mean “king.”

According to most accounts, the Vanniyars were born in opposition to two demons—Vātāpi and Māhi, or Entapi—who had received the boon of invincibility against everything except fire, allowing them to swallow the wind and the sun (images of the *pralaya*, or “dissolution” of the universe). The first Vanniyar—variously called Vira Vanniyar, Rudra Vanniyar, Vanni Rāja, or Ban-nirāya—was thus born from the flames of the sacrificial fire (in one account, along with a host of armed horsemen) to defeat these demons. He then sired five sons (in one version, with Indra’s daughter), who became the ancestors of the subdivisions of the caste.⁷ A second account, told to me by the Vanniyar caste swami at the Śrī Kailas Ashram near Bangalore in March 1975, relates that the Vanniyars descend from the Dvārapālakas, or “gate guardians,” of the *vanni* (i.e., śamī) tree in which the Pāṇḍavas hid their weapons upon entering the kingdom of Virāṭa “in the Punjab” to begin their period of concealment. Henceforth the Dvārapālakas and their descendants worshipped Draupadī, and they migrated to Kanchipuram where they served as warriors under the Pallavas.

These two legends have, in fact, certain striking common features. Both hark back to the Pallava period, for the demon Vātāpi conquered by Vira Vanniyar is none other than the personification of the Chalukyan capital of Badami, derived from an ancient name of that city (Thurston and Rangachari 1904, 4: 4). In this legend, the “original” Vanniyars not only serve the Pallavas as warriors, but are linked to a folk memory of the defeat of Badami by Narasimhavarman Pallava around 643 (see above, chap. 2). Moreover, there are reasons to suspect that Vira Vanniyar–Vanni Rāja and the *vanni* tree are each further elaborations of the primary theme of the Vanniyars’ fiery birth. While Vira Vanniyar is born from a sacrificial fire, the *vanni* or śamī tree provides one of the two types of firesticks—the horizontal “female” one—that kindle the Vedic sacrificial fire (Biardeau 1981a, 218–19). In Vanniyar marriages, Vira Vanniyar and the *vanni* tree have a certain ritual equivalence: in Karnataka “they do *pūjā* to the name of Agni Vahni Rāya, their progenitor, burning frankincense” (Nanjundayya and Iyer 1928–35, 4: 618), while in North Arcot “the first of the posts supporting the [marriage] booth must be cut from the *vanni*, a tree which they hold in much reverence” because it bore the Pāṇḍavas’ weapons

7. See *ibid.* 6: 4–6; Nanjundayya and Iyer 1928–35, 4: 609; Nayakar 1891, 14; Cox 1881, 280–81. According to the chapbook version of the Terukkūttu drama *Vanniya Nāṭakam* (Pillai and Nākaliṅkam 1902, 88), the five sons also come from a sacrificial fire.

(Cox 1881, 281; Thurston and Rangachari 1904, 6: 19). I will have more to say about the *śamī-vaṇṇi* tree (usually identified as *Prosopis spicigera*). But it must suffice at this point to note that it is the subject of numerous multiforms, some of them ritual implements like the pandal post, and others additional fire-related heroes like Vira Vaṇṇiyan-Vaṇṇi Rāja, the most important of whom, for the Draupadī cult, will be the omnipresent figure of Pōttu Rāja.⁸

It is thus apparent that the Vaṇṇiyar legends of origins can be readily linked with the Draupadī cult and the *Mahābhārata*. In one account, their ancestors guard the Pāṇḍavas' weapons. In the other, their birth from a sacrificial fire is directly reminiscent of the epic birth of Draupadī herself, along with her brother Dhṛṣṭadyumna. With regard to this latter tradition, the Vaṇṇiyars' birth from fire has direct bearing on their claim to be Kṣatriyas. In his well-researched treatise advocating the "restoration" of the Vaṇṇiyars' Kṣatriya status after the 1871 census had identified them as Śūdras, T. N. Nayakar, a Vaṇṇiyar himself, presented the argument that Kṣatriyas are born from fire only for special ends. Otherwise they are born from the arms of the primal Puruṣa (as in the *Puruṣa Sūkta*), or after the "deluge," from mixed-caste marriages (Nayakar 1891, 9). The fire-birth of Draupadī and her brother Dhṛṣṭadyumna is, of course, for a special destructive end, as is that of the ancestor of the Vaṇṇiyars.

It is noteworthy that the notion of a Kṣatriya "fire race" (Agnikula) has wide and quite probably ancient reverberations that go beyond the formal Purāṇic claim that there are only two Kṣatriya royal lines: the lunar (Candra or Soma Vaṃśa) and the solar (Sūrya Vaṃśa). According to South Indian traditions, the three kingdoms of the classical Caṅkam age included not only the lunar Pandyas and solar Cholas, but the Agnikula Cheras (Nayakar 1891, 8, 16). The Vaṇṇiyars also style themselves Agnikula or Vahnikula Kṣatriyas. There are certain striking similarities between the Vaṇṇiyar myths of fire origins and myths from North India accounting for the origins of the Agnikula Kṣatriyas or Rajputs of Rajasthan (see Hildebeitel 1982b, 75, n. 24). It is thus possible, as Krishnaswamy Aiyangar has argued (1911, 390-95), that a prototype Agnikula

8. In all matters relating to Pōttu Rāja and the *vaṇṇi-śamī* tree, I owe primary inspiration to Madeleine Biarreau, who set me on the trail of the *śamī* and the buffalo as early as the fall of 1974. Biarreau indicates other figures close to Vira Vaṇṇiyan and Pōttu Rāja, most notably the demon Vaṇṇiyāsura, who doubles in Tamilnadu for the Buffalo Demon Mahiṣāsura (1981a, 228-30), and the guardian god Akkiṇiviraṇ (Sanskrit Agni-vīra, "Fire Hero"), who protects the goddess Paccaivāliyamman in her cult, another firewalking cult popular among Vaṇṇiyars (Biarreau, in press).

myth of considerable antiquity circulated widely in different parts of India. The notion of fire womb-born (*agniyonija*) warriors is used in the *Mahābhārata* with reference to the *Kirātas*, "tribal" warriors from the mountains who fight at Kurukṣetra (7.87.30).⁹

In any case, *Vaṇṇiyar* claims to military origins and Kṣatriya identity rely on more than myth. The name *Vaṇṇiyar* itself can be given another etymology, from *val-*, the root for "strength." Similarly, the most common caste titles also reflect a Kṣatriya self-image. *Paṭaiyācci* (*Padaiyachi*) means "leader of an army." *Kavuṇṭar* (*Goundar*), very common for *Vaṇṇiyars* in South Arcot but also for *Vēlālars* in Kongunad (see Beck 1982, 25; *Tamil Lexicon*, s.v. *ka-vuṇṭar*), can be derived from *kā-miṇṭan*, "strong man (*miṇṭan*) who protects (*kā*)."¹⁰ And of course *Nāyakar*, "leader," is a prestige title of royal and military implications whose use was no doubt intensified among *Vaṇṇiyars* under the influence of the Telugu speaking *Nāyaks* (i.e., *Nāyakars*, var. *Nāyūṭus* or *Naidus*) who ruled Gingee and other surrounding kingdoms in the Vijayanagar period.

Moreover, beyond such linguistic indicators, the *Vaṇṇiyars'* Kṣatriya claims are rooted in their history. There is, to begin with, no reason to discount the above-mentioned traditions that *Vaṇṇiyars* formed an important part of the Pallava soldiery.¹¹ And after the Pallava period there is increasing evidence of *Vaṇṇiyars* assuming "Kṣatriya" roles and activities, beginning in 1189 with an inscription mentioning a local *Vaṇṇiyar* chief ruling from Tiruviṭaiccūram near Chingleput.¹²

But it is especially in the Vijayanagar period that their Kṣatriya affinities come most into view. One inscription, referring to the Vijayanagar king Deva Rāya II (1419–44) as "the lord who took the heads of the eighteen *Vaṇṇiyars*," suggests that the early Vijayanagar period saw attempts by *Vaṇṇiyars* (in this case apparently from Ramnad, where they are said to have had eighteen forts) to assert independence from Vijayanagar rule (Thurston and Rangachari 1904, 6: 7). Quite possibly the number eighteen has resonances here, as elsewhere, with the *Mahābhārata*.¹³ But the larger

9. For additional epic references, see Nayakar 1891, 14; on other South Indian castes claiming births from fire, see Thurston and Rangachari 1904, 2: 448; 3: 263; 7: 170.

10. These etymologies are supplied by Pon Kothandaraman, personal communication.

11. Oppert's attempt (1893, 101) to link *Paṭli*—a widely used, though (according to Tamil informants) derogatory, name for *Vaṇṇiyars* in Tamilnadu, Karnataka, and coastal Andhra—with Pallava has won no known adherents.

12. Thurston and Rangachari 1904, 6: 7; Nayakar 1891, 30–31; Mahalingam 1972, 94; Hultzsch 1899, 82–83 (inscription 36).

13. Cf. Babb 1975, 5: the region of Chhattisgarh, "thirty-six forts," composed of two "eighteen fort" subdivisions.

picture through the Vijayanagar period is one of Vanniyars gaining increasing prominence through alliances with Vijayanagar Nāyaks and the displacement of Vēlālars in Toṇṭaimaṇṭalam, particularly in those areas under the sway of the Nāyak of Gingee (Stein 1980, 445, 450). It is at this point above all that one must assume that Vanniyars took on roles as soldiers in the standing armies of the Nāyaks. Indeed, something of their activities can be gleaned from fifteenth- and sixteenth-century inscriptions that mention Vanniyar warriors in Tamil armies that migrate from South Arcot to conquer and settle in Śrī Lanka (Stein 1980, 187, n. 41; Thurston and Rangachari 1904, 6: 8). One suspects that Draupadī cult traditions in Śrī Lanka (see Nevill 1887a, 1887b; M. D. Raghavan 1961, 75–77) may date from these movements. And within South Arcot, one may further infer that the Vanniyars in this period either consolidated or established their position there as a locally dominant caste.

From the Vijayanagar period on, one still finds Vanniyars associated with Kṣatriya prerogatives: as Zamindars, subordinate soldiers to Poligars, and so on (Nayakar 1891, 22–23; Thurston and Rangachari 1904, 6: 8). It is more than likely that certain Draupadī temples owe their origins to the settlements of such Vanniyar soldiers. K. T. Pandurangi informed me that one of the four Draupadī temples in Bangalore—the Kalassipalayam temple—is still affiliated with Vanniyars who live in the city's old military cantonment area. Similarly, the Ālantūr (Allundur) temple near Saint Thomas Mount just south of Madras, where it is near the cantonment area of Pūṇamalli (Poonamallee), is said by its present-day Vanniyar pūcāri to have been founded by a British colonel who had been vouchsafed a vision of Draupadī. The colonel, whose name is spelled Āṭṭilari in Tamil, ordered the temple “built by the military,” and he then handed it over to its first Vahnrikula Kṣatriya trustees. One suspects, however, that the Śrī Āṭṭilari Dharmarāja Kōyil of Ālantūr owes its origins not to any “Colonel Āṭṭilari,” but to the ranks of Vanniyar soldiers who served in the *artillery* of the British army.

B. Parameters of Diffusion

Social, historical, and geographical factors such as these suggest a primary role for the Vanniyars, through migrations as well as other channels of transmission and interaction, in providing impetus for the Draupadī cult's dispersal. Indeed, some of their own movements survive in memories. Informants at Draupadī temples in Cuddalore and Mutikai Nallāṅkuppam (a hamlet of Tirukkalukunṅam) claim that their ancestors settled there after coming “from

Gingee." Farther afield, Vaṇṇiyars at the Blackpalli Dharmarāja Temple in Bangalore claim that their ancestors migrated there from Tiruvannamalai, the site, according to them, of Draupadī's most ancient temple. Probably we have here the substitution of the well-known town of Tiruvannamalai, famous for its great Śiva temple, for the long-forgotten Gingee. Tiruvannamalai does have three Draupadī temples: one largely defunct but architecturally quite elaborate (the *kāṭṭu-t-tiraupatīyamman kōyil*, or "Forest Draupadī-*amman* Temple"), and two others of no more than local importance. There is nothing to indicate that any of them ever challenged the claims to primacy of the Mēlaccēri temple, only forty miles away. Other Vaṇṇiyars in Karnataka—also worshippers of Draupadī—claim that their ancestors migrated from the equally if not more famous town of Kanchipuram (Nanjundayya and Iyer 1928–35, 4: 609), again in the same "Gingee region."

As we shall see, there are numerous reasons to think that recollections of the Draupadī cult's associations with Gingee have been in a long state of eclipse since the decline of Gingee's importance at the beginning of the eighteenth century. We have also noted that outside the central area, Draupadī temples are largely limited to urban and other high population centers, a pattern that suggests a migration of the cult to these areas rather than development there from a local basis. Diffusion of the cult outside of India, while not necessarily confirming a connection with Vaṇṇiyars, would seem to conform to the same geographical pattern. We have noted the spread of Vaṇṇiyars to Śrī Lanka, and we may suspect that they have something to do with the transmission of the Draupadī cult there.¹⁴ The spread of the cult to Fiji is traced back to Chingleput District (Brown 1976, 4). And the Draupadī temple at Singapore is linked to "a community of boat repairmen who came from a village of Vadakku Poigaiyoor near Nagapattinam" (Babb 1974, 3) on the Kaveri Delta, an area we can consider a southern coastal extension of the cult's main area.

As I have remarked, this hypothesis is not without its risks and problems. For one thing, it is so simple as to arouse suspicion, and I must confess that I long resisted it for that reason. But counter-hypotheses have less to recommend them. A hypothesis of Pallava origins is, at best, only a temptation. It is possible that the cult originally had nothing to do with Gingee: that it was first diffused

14. The castes most directly involved are apparently Vēlālars (Nevill 1887b, 59) and Karāvas who claim to be descendants of Kaurava refugees of the *Mahābhārata* war and members of the Solar and Lunar rather than Agni royal lines (see M. D. Raghavan 1961, 5, 73).

prior to the period of Gingee's ascendancy, and then colored by associations with it only in the Gingee area. The results of an attempt to survey Draupadī temples for their recollections of links with Gingee could be taken in this sense. Asked in a posted questionnaire whether the stone for the main temple image of Draupadī, or the sand on which it was set, was brought from Gingee, all of the respondents from outside the area of map 2 showed that they were unfamiliar with such a custom, whereas over half of those within the area indicated that at their temples the custom had been followed.¹⁵ One could take this as evidence that the associations with Gingee were superimposed only in the Gingee area. But it seems more likely that it is the old connections with Gingee that have either been forgotten, as with the recollections of Tiruvannamalai from Bangalore, or that they have been replaced by more recent and more local associations. Once Gingee lost its political and military importance in the early eighteenth century, the proliferation of Draupadī temples did not stop. Indeed, during the past two decades new ones have continued to be built (for instance, one of the two temples at Maṅkaḷam, and temples at Nallānpettāl and Teynampet). But the associations with Gingee would seem to have been kept alive only in the area where Gingee's renown lived on in folklore and regional historical recollections.

As well as asking about recollections of associations with Gingee, the above-mentioned questionnaire also pinpointed two other components of our hypothesis. It can be observed that the literature on the Draupadī cult, which until the recent studies of Frasca (1984) and Shideler (1987) was disproportionately concerned with temples and festivals outside the core area, make little mention of two figures who are prominently connected with the cult within the area. These two, who will become more and more familiar as our discussion proceeds, are Draupadī's "bodyguards": Pōttu Rāja and Muttāl Rāvuttan. The early literature mentions Pōttu Rāja outside the central area only once: in Richards's description of Draupadī festivals in Bangalore (1910, 31). Elsewhere, Pōttu Rāja is unmentioned; but certain of his iconic traits and festival functions seem

15. The sample is small. Of one hundred Draupadī temples addressed, thirteen supplied pertinent responses: four from outside the area (three from Tiruchirappalli District, one from Coimbatore District), none recalling Gingee; and nine from within, five recalling Gingee. In fact, so far no site outside the area of map 2 has yielded either written or oral familiarity with traditions linking Draupadī with Gingee. Cf. also Daniel 1984, 95–101: one Vēḷāḷar lineage brings soil from their own and their caste goddess Kāmācci's native *ūr* (village/region) to their new home for the goddess herself to validate the appropriation of new lands.

to have been retained in connection with other figures, most notably Virabhadra.¹⁶ In such cases, it is natural to suppose that Pöttu Rāja has been replaced by pan-Hindu figures. Indeed, we will find that whereas Pöttu Rāja is the head-holding protector of Draupadī, Virabhadra can be seen as the head-holding avenger of Śiva's consort Sati.

Muttāl Rāvuttan also surfaces only once in this early literature, significantly named "Mutala Raja" on Babb's sketch map of the Draupadī shrine within the compound of the Singapore Māriyamman Temple (Babb 1974, map 1). Even though Babb does not discuss this figure, there can be no doubt that it is the same personage as Muttāl Rāvuttan. His *maṇḍapa* (pavilion) is exactly where one would expect it: to the northeast of the Draupadī temple. Sunthar Visuvalingam informs me further that Muttāl Rāvuttan is present by his rightful name in some Draupadī temples in nearby Malaysia. The change in name at the Singapore temple suggests the possibility that he has lost his most distinctive trait there. Whereas *rāvuttan* connotes a Muslim "trooper" (Tamil Lexicon, s.v. *iravuttan*) or warrior on horseback, *rāja* suggests an ordinary Hindu "king." Even within the main area of the Draupadī cult, one can find informants who admit no knowledge that Muttāl Rāvuttan is a Muslim (see below, chap. 6). But for the most part his Muslim status is clearly recognized. In districts surrounding the central area, however, one again finds evidence that his profile has receded. Within the Gingee core area, seven of the nine temples that responded to my questionnaire had representations of Muttāl Rāvuttan, while beyond that area he was represented only at one temple out of four (at Olaiyūr) "by a very small limestone doll" (*pomma*). Similarly, Pöttu Rāja was found in all nine temples within the main area (again as one would expect), and in three of the four outside it. But most significantly, in the one instance where he was unknown—the same temple at Olaiyūr that was familiar with Muttāl Rāvuttan¹⁷—it was Virabhadra who took his place "in front of the temple" (*kōvilukku munṇapuram*).

These ratios are quite consonant with what was observed in my fieldwork. Where he was sought, for instance, Muttāl Rāvuttan was represented in two of four temples (Salem, Kolar) in the dis-

16. See Babb 1974, 5, 7, 19, 23, 27 (Singapore); Somander 1951, 613, and Nevill 1887b, 58 (Sri Lanka). In Fiji certain functions associated with Pöttu Rāja seem to have become connected with Subrahmanya-Murukan; see Brown 1976, 28.

17. Masilamani-Meyer has also found Muttāl Ravuttan at two Thanjavur District Draupadī temples, neither of which have an image of Pöttu Rāja (personal communication; see also below, chap. 6, n. 28).

tracts surrounding the core area (he is not found at the Bangalore Blackpalli temple or at Dindigul). But as most of my study was carried out in the core area, there is considerable room for further research. For the present, I have chosen the best route open to me: that of testing the hypothesis of diffusion through the careful study of one special, well-documented case. It is one that allows us to go far beyond the limited criteria discussed so far to some of the more complex features of the Draupadī cult.

C. The Case of Dindigul

Among the precious manuscripts collected by Colin Mackenzie at the turn of the nineteenth century, one records a remarkably complete description of the annual Draupadī festival at the Dharmarāja temple in Dindigul,¹⁸ an important taluk headquarters and once fortified town in Madurai District only sixty-three miles from Madurai city. The author of the manuscript indicates that the temple was founded about a hundred years before his time (ca. 1700) by one Erumaikkāra Eṭaiyar, presumably an Iṭaiyar or Kōṇār. In 1981, the temple was said to be three hundred years old (ca. 1680), whereas the Madurai District *Temples* volume of the 1961 census (Nambiar et al. 1969, 18–19) lists its age at 350 years (ca. 1611).¹⁹

There is nothing in the manuscript to associate the temple with Gingee, although it is certainly conceivable that pressures on Gingee that had well begun and were steadily increasing during the seventeenth century could have been connected with migrations away from that area toward the south. Nor are there any recollections of associations with Gingee at the temple today. But there have been drastic and dramatic changes in the temple's ritual cycle and mythology over the roughly one hundred and seventy-five years since it was first described. And the remarkable thing is that the changes point consistently in one direction: what were in the early nineteenth century a temple and a festival very much like those one still finds in the Gingee core area today have since become something almost totally different.

18. Mackenzie Collection, no. 68, 135–46. A. Prema is listed as the copyist, but it is not clear who authored the manuscript, possibly the two pūcāris (Veṅkatācala Pūcāri and Muttu Kirusṇaṇ Pūcāri) who are mentioned. See Mahalingam 1972, 104, for an inadequate and rather misleading summation. I thank M. Rajendran of the Oriental Manuscripts Library, University of Madras, for his help going over this manuscript with me.

19. Preliminary fieldwork at the Dindigul temple carried out on my own in March 1975 was richly supplemented by my assistant C. T. Rajan in December 1981, and by his further inquiry in December 1984.

In the early 1800s the Dindigul temple celebrated a firewalking festival of basically the same type that one finds today in the more traditional, conservative temples of the core area. First of all, it was held as a "springtime festival" (*vacantanāl*) in the month of Vaikāci (May-June). The analogous term *akkini vacanta vilā*, "spring fire festival," is currently used in our research area, and it is noteworthy that its application is not restricted to the conventional *vacanta* ("spring") months of Cittirai (April-May) and Vaikāci, but extends throughout the hot season of March through August in which Draupadī festivals occur. The Dindigul temple today, however, no longer holds either a spring festival or a firewalking festival. Indeed, though informants at the temple were aware that firewalking is performed at other Draupadī temples, and knew of such ceremonies at Cōlavantāṇ, Nilakottai Taluk, Madurai District (cf. Nambiar et al. 1969, 100–101), they insisted not only that there is no such practice at Dindigul now, but that there was never firewalking there at all.²⁰ On the contrary, rather than a spring firewalk, the Dindigul temple's main festival is now a fall Navarātra—that is, a "nine night" festival on the model of a typical Brahmanical fall festival to the goddess—in the first nine days of the bright fortnight of Puraṭṭāci (September-October). And as far as today's Dindigul informants are concerned, that is the way it has always been.

It is evident, however, that at some point (or through some process) in the past 175 years, a typical spring festival of the general type that honors Draupadī and other rural or "village" goddesses throughout South India has been transformed into a fall Navarātra of this pan-Hindu type.²¹ It is important to note, however, that this more generally diffused Navarātra is colored in its popular forms by the aspect that such rites take on in connection with the more specifically royal rites of Vijayādaśamī ("Victory Tenth") or Dasarā (Sanskrit Daśāhara, "Tenth Day"). As a generalized Hindu rite, the fall Navarātra is performed not so much for "local" goddesses like Draupadī as for the goddess in her "great tradition" aspects: Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, and above all Durgā, who is worshipped on the "tenth day" (Daśāhara, Dasarā) after the "ninth night" (the meaning of

20. The Cōlavantāṇ temple, unnumbered but shown on map 1 as the dot directly between Dindigul and Madurai, was visited by J. Rajasekaran (of the Wisconsin Year in India Program, Madurai) in 1986. His notes show not only the continuation of firewalking, but other traditional "core area" features in the temple and festival. But there is no Terrukkūttu.

21. Cf. Beck 1981, 100–103, finding that 70 percent of the 1,173 Māriyamman festivals reported in the 1961 Tamilnadu *Fairs and Festivals* volume (Nambiar, Karup, et al. 1968) occur in the three months from Paṅkuṇi (March-April) to Vaikāci. The corresponding figure for Draupadī festivals is 63 percent of the 214 reported, while 86 percent occur between Paṅkuṇi and Āṭi (July-August).

the term *navarātri*) as the "goddess of Victory" (*Vijayā*) for, among other things, her conquest of *Mahiṣāsura*, the Buffalo Demon. Among prominent South Indian examples, a fall *Navarātra* and *Dasarā*, with elaborate buffalo (and goat) sacrifices, formed one of the most important royal festivals of the Vijayanagar dynasty (Stein 1980, 384–90; Saletore, 2: 378–85). A similar festival is still celebrated, near Dindigul, at the former Vijayanagar *Nāyakate* of Madurai in the temple of *Mīnākṣī*, the preeminent goddess temple in southern Tamilnadu and, as we shall see, the likely model for the changes that occurred at the Dindigul *Draupadī* festival. The fall *Navarātra* at Madurai, during which *Mīnākṣī* is identified with *Durgā* (Fuller and Logan 1985, 79–101), is performed at the same time as the one at Dindigul.

In part, it will thus be possible to regard the changes at Dindigul as the result of a process of "Brahmanization," involving an "upgrading" of *Draupadī* and her cult to bring them into accord with such Brahmanical norms as are associated with Madurai *Mīnākṣī*. Analogous processes recur at other *Draupadī* temples, especially in urban settings. But one must not regard the change at Dindigul from a spring goddess festival to a pan-Hindu *Navarātra* as simply a one-way process, or view it solely in the context of Brahmanization. Spring festivals for *Draupadī* have what one might call an inherent susceptibility to being interpreted as variations of *Navarātra* and *Dasarā*. Indeed, the connections between these "little tradition" and "great tradition" rites are pervasive and require us to keep constantly in mind that the Hindu ceremonial calendar—both in North and South India—knows not only a fall *Navarātra* but a spring *Navarātra* as well, in the month of *Cittirai*. It is in the South in particular that the spring *Navarātra* is widely diffused in connection with hot season festivals for local goddesses. It would seem, in fact, that such spring *Navarātras* substitute compensatorily for the fall *Navarātra* that is traditionally culminated by *Dasarā*, but is far less common in the South than in the North. For our present purposes, it must suffice to say that it is the spring *Navarātra*—much diffused and transformed, yet retaining the royal character and "Brahmanical" structure that it shares with the fall *Navarātra* (plus *Dasarā*)—that provides one of the most important models for the spring festivals of *Draupadī* and other rural South Indian goddesses.²²

22. See Biardreau 1981a, 224–25; in press; Kane [1930–62] 1975, 5: 154, 186; Babb 1975, 132–40, 154–56; Gaborieau 1982, 17–18; Stein 1980, 386–87 (at Vijayanagar); Ramakrishna Rao 1921, 301–2; Fuller and Logan 1985, 100–103; and Hildebeitel 1985c, 179–89 on the springtime ten-day festival culminating in a buffalo sacrifice at the Gingee Fort, further discussed in chapter 4.

Let us then look more closely at the ceremonies of the Dindigul Draupadī temple, first as they were recorded in the early 1800s, and then as they were found in 1981. Here we must content ourselves with noting that the old festival follows an "ideal" structure that will become more familiar in our discussions of Draupadī cult mythology and ritual. It was built around an eighteen-day sequence of the type mentioned in chapter 1, a sequence that symbolically recapitulates the *Mahābhārata*'s eighteen-day war and represents the entire *Mahābhārata* through a scansion of epic episodes. Furthermore, it highlighted in its culminating ceremonies the same three rituals that are most consistently enacted today at the culmination of Draupadī festivals in the cult heartland: (1) *nallaraivāṇ kaṭopoli* (more correctly, *aravāṇ kaḷappali*), the battlefield sacrifice of Aravāṇ at the beginning of the war; (2) *turiyotana paṭukaḷam*, the killing of Duryodhana, for which *paṭukaḷam* ("battlefield," "place of lying down") is the key ritual term; and (3) firewalking (*tīmiti*). This is not to say that the old Dindigul festival followed this pattern in any typical way. Even where the Draupadī cult is most concentrated, the components of the "ideal" festival are treated in countless different ways, and it is probably fair to say that there are no two temples that handle these three ceremonies identically. But it is clear that the underlying model for the old Dindigul festival was the same one that is still operative in the core area today.

There is, however, one feature of the old Dindigul festival important not only as one of its unusual features, but as one of the few ritual elements that would seem to have survived. When the information in the Mackenzie manuscript was collected, each day of the eighteen-day festival was the occasion of a procession through the Dindigul streets. Each of the eighteen processions represented a different episode of the *Mahābhārata* in a sequence basically compatible with Villiputtūr Ālvār's Tamil version of the epic.²³ One striking aspect of these processions today is their seeming condensation of festival features that are usually handled separately in the core area today.

The eighteen Dindigul processions involved the telling of *Mahābhārata* episodes through their rendering into Tamil songs (*pāṭṭu*). These were sung to the accompaniment of the *uṭuppumaṇi*, prob-

23. The *Villipāratam* is clearly a model for the selection and ordering of Terukkūttu dramas at Draupadī festivals (see below, chap. 7, sec. A). At early nineteenth-century Dindigul, it is particularly the twelfth-day procession representing the *nelli* fruit episode (see chap. 7 and chap. 13, sec. B) that shows an unmistakable link with Villi, for this scene has no earlier known source than the *Villipāratam*.

ably the hourglass-shaped *uṭukkai* drum and the *maṇi*, or bell. In at least one case—the sixth-day procession enacting the marriage of Draupadī and Arjuna—the scene was dramatized by two actors dressed (*vēṣampōṭṭukkoṇṭu*) as the bridal pair, who performed the wedding scene on the street. In the Gingee core area, one finds all of these elements in contemporary Draupadī festivals. But they are not found—at least to my knowledge—in the same combination. Narrative of the stories is the province of professional reciters called *pāratīyārs* or *pārata piracaṇkis*, “*Mahābhārata* reciters” or “preachers.” The enactment of *Mahābhārata* episodes to the accompaniment of Tamil songs is normally the province of itinerant Terukkūttu troupes, which in “ideal” conditions define the course of the eighteen-day festival cycle by their performance of eighteen night-long plays. Processions, on the other hand, though they may also occur on each day or night of the festival, normally represent epic scenes only by specific decorations (*alaṁkāras*) of the processional icons. But as we shall see, there are also certain temples within the core area that have processions in which local actors, rather than the itinerant Terukkūttu performers, dramatize selected epic scenes. Meanwhile, the hourglass drum and bell are not so much typical instruments of the Terukkūttu as infrequently found ritual paraphernalia of the Draupadī temple.

It now seems likely that the Dindigul temple, some one hundred or more years after its founding in an area quite far removed from the center of its cult, had already begun to condense and synthesize aspects of its festival that were once distinct. Although I am unable to prove that Terukkūttu dramas were performed at Draupadī temples prior to the early 1800s, it is most likely that they were, at least in some early form. And it is also likely that the Terukkūttu troupes with *Mahābhārata* repertoires circulated, then as today, mainly if not solely in our core area.²⁴ To retain the basic structure of an eighteen-day Draupadī festival with dramas and processions, a decentralized temple like that at Dindigul would thus have had to improvise, and to use local rather than itinerant professional talent for its ritual and dramatic recreations of epic scenes.

24. The *Indian Express* (Madras) of Tuesday, 13 May 1986, reported a twenty-day festival of Terukkūttu about to begin in South Arcot. The sponsors had located fifty-two troupes in the district and selected nineteen for performances on “Mahabharatha folk tales and contemporary social themes” in Cuddalore, Villupuram, Chidambaram, and Kallakuruchi. The festival, designed to promote and sustain “talented Koothu artistes,” was sponsored by the Association for Community Development by Learning and Doing, a voluntary agency that “brings together landless labourers, marginal farmers and village artisans.”

There will be further occasion in chapters 7 and 8 to examine the relation within the core area between *Mahābhārata* narration, local ritual dramas, and the Terukkūttu. It must suffice here to note that within our main fieldwork area, in the cases where one finds local enactments of epic scenes, it is never a matter of ritually duplicating the Terukkūttu cycle to the number of eighteen episodes, as it was in early nineteenth-century Dindigul. Only select episodes are enacted as ritual: a further indication that it is the cycle of dramas rather than simply the phenomenon of local ritual dramatization that provided the model that the early Dindigul festival sought to retain. We shall return again to the intricacies of this "decentralized" nineteenth-century festival, but for now, it is most intriguing that the one element that appears to have survived this early process of condensation into the late twentieth century is a solitary processional drama, now a quite anomalous feature of this otherwise largely Brahmanized festival.

Today's Dindigul Draupadī festival is a ten-day affair, comprising the nine days of Navarātra and the tenth day of Dasarā.²⁵ On each day a Brahman (Aiyar) priest decorates certain icons or other objects for a nighttime procession. In most cases, these alamkāras involve the assimilation of Draupadī and her cult to more widely recognized, pan-regional, and Brahmanically sanctioned forms of worship.

On the first day, Draupadī is simply taken out with the five Pāṇḍavas, and on the second, Kṛṣṇa goes on procession with Rādhā. On the third day, however, Draupadī's processional icon is dressed as the distinctly "Vedic" goddess Gāyatrī, with six heads and many arms. And on the fourth day, Draupadī and Yudhiṣṭhira (Tarumar or Dharma) are dressed for their marriage as Minākṣī (the "fish-eyed" goddess) and Cokkanātar (or Sundarēśvara, the "Beautiful Lord"), these being the forms in which Pārvatī and Śiva are worshipped (and married) at the great Minākṣī temple in nearby Madurai. Indeed, it is notable that it is now no longer Draupadī's marriage with Arjuna that is ceremonially most significant, but her marriage with the more Brahmanical Dharma, assimilated to Śiva's most prominent regional form. On the fifth day, Draupadī is taken in procession with the "Eight Lakṣmīs." On the sixth day, Arjuna's chariot (*tēr*) is driven by Kṛṣṇa to the *Mahābhārata* war, highlighting

25. A *karakam* procession occurs two days before the ten-day cycle begins. The *karakam* pot, which a *pūcāri* normally carries over the firepit on his head at the culmination of the festival, has probably been retained here as another vestigial element of the earlier Draupadī festival, now detached from the main festival cycle.

Kṛṣṇa in his favored form as Pārthasārathi, "the charioteer of Pārtha" (Arjuna), and of course evoking the scene of the *Bhāgavad Gītā*. On the seventh day, a statue of Aiyappaṇ set above eighteen steps is taken out to replicate Aiyappaṇ's famous pilgrimage temple (which is approached by eighteen steps) atop Sabarimalai Mountain. And on the eighth day, a "hill" is made of books to represent Tirumalai Mountain, home of one of the most celebrated Viṣṇu temples in all South India. It is to be noted that Draupadī has not been taken on procession since the fifth day, a pattern that continues into the ninth, when the figures carried in procession are Sarasvatī, Lakṣmī, and Gaṇeśa. One also notes the absence of Durgā here. Presumably it is she who is represented by Draupadī herself when the latter is finally taken on procession once again on the tenth day—the day of Durgā's victory—this time in the company of her victorious husband, Arjuna. Draupadī and Arjuna are commonly paired for processions, most notably for their victorious crossing of the coals in firewalking ceremonies. And it is likely that this culminating procession at Dindigul is another vestige or fragment of a ritual of this type.

But the main survival that concerns us here is that amid all the Brahmanical transformations, there is one procession that is still accompanied by a ritual enactment of an epic scene. On the sixth day, the procession is joined between 11 A. M. and 1 P. M. by two main actors and a supporting cast, all from the local Nāyakar community. This community, which now handles the entire festival, speaks Telugu in the home, thus differentiating itself from Tamil-speaking Vaṇṇiyars. It is certainly likely that they have played a major role in shaping the transformations we have observed in the Dindigul festival.²⁶ Two of their number now enact the episode of the killing of Kīcaka by Bhīma.

This episode would normally occur before the war: during their period in disguise, Kīcaka had tried to seduce Draupadī, and Bhīma was called upon to avenge her by killing him. But it seems that it

26. These Telugu-speaking Nāyakars also differentiate themselves from Telugu Nāyūṭus (Naidus), while using the latter name as a common caste title. As a group, they claim about a hundred families in Dindigul, and they also claim to be found widely in southern Tamilnadu and Kerala. Draupadī festival processions in Dindigul proceed along Nāyakar Street, where the community is centered. Further work is needed to determine whether Draupadī is worshipped elsewhere by this community, and what, if any, connections it has had with other communities worshipping Draupadī. If they played a role in transforming the cult, as one may suspect, then it is possible that they took over the temple from earlier Vaṇṇiyar (i.e., Nāyakar) and Kōṇār communities (we have seen Mackenzie manuscript evidence that one of the founders of the temple was probably from the Kōṇār community).

has come at Dindigul to represent, by condensation, the combative and violent aspects of the *Mahābhārata* war itself. For it is the only vestige of violence in the festival, and it is enacted conjointly with the procession of Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa on the war chariot. In any case, the actor who portrays Kīcaka has his arms tied back and chains placed around his chest and is dragged through the streets by the chains while one person (not yet Bhīma) presses "a sort of crowbar" against him, which is identified as Bhīma's mace (*kataiyutam*; Sanskrit *gadāyudyham*). At first Bhīma follows about a furlong behind, but at last he approaches and "kills" Kīcaka with this weapon. Both actors become possessed (*āvēcam*, "possession," or *aruḷ varutal*, "the coming of grace"); and in Bhīma's case the possession is calmed when a *kāvaṭi*—a shoulder-borne arch usually sacred to the popular god Murukan—is placed into his hands. Needless to say, there is further evidence of cultic syncretism here: the *kāvaṭi* has no place at Draupadī festivals in the core area, though it does elsewhere (cf. Babb 1974, 18, 34–35).

This rather crude processional drama seems incongruous, as its epic context is all but lost. But it is likely that it is more than just a condensation of the epic themes of violence. As a public drama with local actors, it is probably the last vestige of the eighteen processional dramas that were performed at Dindigul in the early nineteenth century. The Mackenzie manuscript does not mention an enactment of the death of Kīcaka. But it does indicate that on the fourteenth day of the eighteen-day festival (thus four days before the end, as is the case still today) the procession involved an enactment of the episode of the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī's period in disguise. It mentions the names and roles each assumed while incognito, and indicates that Draupadī took the name Pūvāḷicci, "Flower Stringer." It is in this guise that she would arouse Kīcaka's lust, and it is quite likely that the episodes of Kīcaka's attempted seduction of Draupadī and his eventual pulverization by Bhīma were part of the total portrayal. As we shall see in chapter 13, the donning of disguises and the killing of Kīcaka are the highlights of a single and very prominent Terukkūttu play called *Kīcaka Cam-māram*, "The Destruction of Kīcaka": one of only a few plays that are important at core area Draupadī festivals in inducing possession in both actors and audience alike.

Finally, before we leave the Dindigul temple, we should note one other possible, and indeed likely, transformation: this time not so much a ritual as an iconic change. It will be recalled that one of our gauges of the diffusion of the Draupadī cult has been the degree to which it keeps intact the relation found in the core area between Draupadī and her two "bodyguards" Pōttu Rāja and Muttāl

Rāvuttan. At Dindigul, to the northeast of the inner sanctum where one usually finds Muttāl Rāvuttan, there is a double icon set against the wall of the temple compound. One image is said to be Vīrapattiran (Sanskrit Virabhadra), and the other is alternately identified as Ātivīrapattiran ("Primal Virabhadra") or Maturaivīran, "the Hero of Madurai." We have seen how common it is for the pan-Hindu figure of Virabhadra to replace Pōttu Rāja, and we may suspect that something of this kind would help us to account for the first identification. As to Maturaivīran, in the southern districts of Tamilnadu he is a well-known regional figure of the same "guardian" type (see Mahalingam 1972, 224; Arunachalam 1976, 189–91; Whitehead 1921, 113–15), and he is most plausibly a Madurai-area substitute for, or reidentification of, Pōttu Rāja or Muttāl Rāvuttan.

In any case, as with Pōttu Rāja and Muttāl Rāvuttan in the core area, Vīrabhadra and Maturaivīran are described at Dindigul as Draupadī's "divine watchmen" (*kāval teyvam*); indeed, in a term that echoes one usually reserved for Pōttu Rāja, they are *munṇoti teyvanikal*, "the gods who run before" Draupadī in processions. Yet if Draupadī is now served in Dindigul by these two attendants, her core area guardians would still seem to have left traces there. Pōttu Rāja is in fact known at the Dindigul temple under an important alternative name of Pōrmaṇṇan, the "War King": a name that, as we shall see, he bears only in the Draupadī cult. And Pōrmaṇṇan himself is represented by two wooden icons that are carried in processions: one showing him on a he-goat, the other on a horse. It would seem that while the processional icons retain a traditional identification, the stationary stone figures have at some point been renamed. But again, it is improbable that there were originally two such different processional images of Pōrmaṇṇan–Pōttu Rāja. One has no problem with the figure on the goat, for we will observe that the goat is widely associated with Pōttu Rāja, even beyond the Draupadī cult. But the horse, which I have never found associated with Pōttu Rāja, would seem to put us on the trail of Muttāl Rāvuttan, for in the Draupadī cult—in the area centered on Gingee—it is he who is represented on horseback as the Muslim "trooper" (*iravuttan*) who becomes Draupadī's devotee.

We must thus return to Gingee and the traditions of its kingdom for a closer look at the setting in which the Draupadī cult seems to have originated and begun its dispersal. Let us now examine the mythical traditions that link the two Gingeess—the "Old Gingee" of Mēlaccēri and the Gingee of the Gingee Fort—together with the cult of Draupadī.

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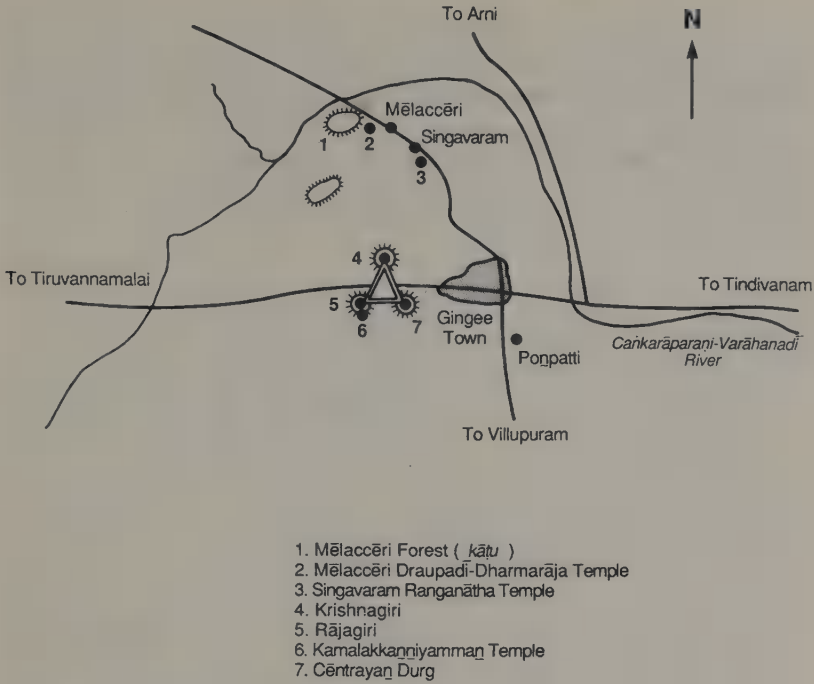
The Sources of the Gingee Kingdom: The Living River and the Tree of Gold

The mythology that connects the Draupadī cult with the kingdom of Gingee presupposes a prior mythology of the Gingee kingdom itself. This chapter will address the primordium of Gingee in its two essential phases: the origins of the Gingee country's sacred river, and the founding of the Gingee Fort. Thus although I will not address Draupadī's mythology proper until chapter 5, this chapter marks a move from Gingee's history to its mythology and fills out the setting—in which myth and history are intertwined—that will make the goddess's Gingee mythology intelligible. Moreover, by showing how the mythology of the Gingee Fort links up with an ongoing annual buffalo sacrifice there, I will set the context for further treatment of the buffalo sacrifice as a structuring theme not only in Draupadī's regional mythology, but in her epic mythology as well.

A. The Living River

The river that meanders through the heartland of the Draupadī cult and enters the sea just south of Pondicherry, is the Varāhanadī or Caṅkarāparaṇi (see maps 2 and 3). Unlike other rivers of the core area, which exist through most of the year as vast sandflats with at most a trickling current connecting a series of wallows, this more rocky and narrow river is reputed to be a *jīvannati*, a "living river": that is, one that never dries up.¹ It is, as we shall see, sacred to the Draupadī cult, especially for its proximity to Draupadī's "temple of origins" at Mēlaccēri. But in beginning our discussion with the river, we begin more with the origins of the land of Gingee rather than of its kingdom, or of the Draupadī cult. The river is already there when the kingdom is founded, and the kingdom is founded before Draupadī comes to "reside in Gingee."

1. According to the pāratīyār Brameesa Mudaliyar.



Map 3. The Ginge Mēlaccēri Area

In fact, the origins of the river are more directly connected with Viṣṇu and Śiva than with the goddess. Caṅkarāparaṇi, the name used by all my informants,² evokes the Ganges: the Sanskrit name, Śaṃkarābharaṇī, means "the ornament of Śiva," a reference to the myth of the descent of the Ganges and to her adornment of Śiva after he has broken her fall to earth by catching her in his wild, entangled hair. It is around Mēlaccēri and Ginge that the river completes an auspicious turn to the north, a fact that reminds one of the northern turn of the Ganges at Kāśī (in Banaras), a turn that points the river back "toward her Himalayan source" (Eck 1982, 212) and provides one of the main symbols of Kāśī's eternity.³

2. And also in Nārāyaṇaṇ Piḷḷai's account of the story of Rāja Desing; see Krishnaswami Aiyangar 1930, 19 (Srinivasachari 1943, 428): Desing impetuously crosses the river in spate, leaving most of his already outnumbered supporters behind, to fight "heroically" to his doom.

3. Cf. Srinivasachari 1943, 13: up to the eighteenth century, Ginge was a hallowed pilgrimage site with a "Sheo Ginge" (Śiva Ginge) and a "Bithen Ginge" (Viṣṇu Ginge), again like Banaras and other pilgrimage centers (including Kanchipuram).

The river's narrative mythology, however, is connected not with Śiva but with Viṣṇu. Varāhanadi, "the river of the boar," is a name that comes with its own regional version of the myth of Viṣṇu's boar (*varāha*) *avatāra*. The oldest known version, recorded by Nārāyaṇa Pillai in his chapter on the history of Gingee in the Mackenzie manuscript "A Detailed History of the Kings of the Carnatic," connects the story with an otherwise unknown king of Kanchipuram named Nantacōla Rāja.

Nantacōla built a flower garden [*nantavanattotṭam*] at Kanchipuram in honor of Varadarājaswāmi [that is, to supply flowers for the temple of Viṣṇu by that name]. But boars devastated the garden. The king attacked them on horseback and dispersed them, but one big boar took up onto his tusk [singular: *kompilē*] a lime tree bush and a flowering *nantiyavāṭṭam* shrub together with some earth [*maṇṇōtu*], and led the king toward Gingee. To the west of Gingee the boar stopped beside a mountain and opened a spring for the king to slake his thirst. The king then chased the boar further east, and as the boar led, it dug a course with its tusk for the water to follow [*panṇi kompālē kīriṇa valiyē taṇṇīr peruki vantatu*]. By Nārāyaṇa's order, the king then chased the boar until it reached Ciṅkapuram, the village of Singavaram about a mile southeast of Mēlaccēri. There the boar entered a cave, dropping the two plants with the earth. The plants flourished on the spot. Meanwhile the king followed into the cave and saw the boar take on the form of Viṣṇu as a human *avatāra* [*viṣṇurūpamāy maṇitar avatāramāy*]. Filled with devotion, the king built a temple there in honor of Varadarājaswāmi. And the boar gave his name to the river whose course he had traced. (Summarizing Dikshitar 1952, 14–16; Diagou 1939, 10–12)

The boar who destroys a flower garden is a recurrent Tamil mytheme.⁴ What is significant here, however, is that the boar is an accessory, and in one variant a "form" (Jagadisa Ayyar 1982a, 182), of Viṣṇu-Varadarāja.

It is curious that the myth links the origins of the river with Kanchipuram, the Pallava capital, but with a Chola rather than a Pallava king, for the temple that Nantacōla also founds is almost certainly the Pallava-period Singavaram temple (see Jagadisa Ayyar

4. See especially Beck 1982, 166–68, on the folk epic figure of Kompan, "the tusked one"; and cf. Dessigane, Pattabiramin, and Filliozat 1960, fasc. 1, 69–72, on the forty-fifth of the "sports of Śiva at Madurai," in which the Pandyan king kills a great boar.

1982a, 183, and above, chap. 2). In fact, it would seem that it is the link with Kanchipuram and its likely echoes of the Pallava past that form a primary feature of this myth, while the identification of the king is secondary. The same basic story is known from two versions from around 1920—one ascribed to “tradition” (Jagadisa Ayyar 1982a, 182–83) and the other to “current tradition” (Srinivasachari 1943, 25–26)—and told about an entirely different “native” or “king of Kanchipuram” named Tupakkal Krishnappa Naick (or Tupakāla Kistnappa Nayak). As we shall see, there are reasons to suspect that this figure is none other than the Tubākki Krishnappa Nāyakar whom we met earlier, not as a king of Kanchipuram, but as the most celebrated of the Nāyaks of Gingee and the founder of their main royal line. Moreover, this will not be the only case where single myths of Gingee have devolved upon different historical personages, among them Tubākki Krishnappa.

As to the Singavaram temple itself, whose regional prominence is reflected in the area’s history, it is also curious that the myth leaves its most celebrated features undescribed.⁵ Viṣṇu is massively represented there on the back wall of the cave in his cosmic form as Anantaśāyin (lying on the serpent Ananta, or Śeṣa), and his shrine is flanked to the north by a niche in the rock-face containing a standing image of Durgā as Mahiṣāsūramardīnī (“Slayer of the Buffalo Demon”). A similar combination of the reclining Viṣṇu and the dynamic, victorious Durgā is found in the Mahiṣāsūramardīnī cave at Mahabalipuram, alerting us to early Pallava representations of the complementarity of Viṣṇu and the goddess, a theme that will figure prominently in this study.⁶

What is most curious in this context, however, is that insofar as the myth stands by itself, or is concerned solely with the relation between the temple and the river, it is only Viṣṇu—and not the goddess—who is invoked. In contrast, as the myth is extended to include the relation between the temple, the kingdom, and the Gingee Fort, the goddess is inevitably implicated.

Yet the goddess is evoked in the mythology of the river, not so much in her independent, royal, and conquering form of Durgā as in her rapports with Śiva and Viṣṇu. The names Varāhanadī and

5. It is this hilltop shrine that safeguards the Śrīraṅgam image of Rāṅganātha in 1371–72 (see appendix 2); and it is also visited by Rāja Desing in his ballad when he worships this deity before his last battle. Desing ignores the god’s warnings (the statue turns its face away from him when he asks for blessing) that he should not go out to fight (Srinivasachari 1943, 428).

6. Srinivasan (1964, 114–15) remarks on these complementarities, citing further instances in Pallava cave temples where forms of Durgā are placed adjacent to other forms of Viṣṇu (e.g., Trivikrama, Varāha).

Caṅkarāparaṇi each recall major purāṇic myths in which these rapports are worked out.⁷ In one, the Ganges descends into Śiva's hair to become his wife. And in the other, the boar—emissary or form of Viṣṇu—carries the earth and two bushes with his "single tusk" from Kanchipuram to Gingee (Singavaram), just as he lifts his wife, the goddess Earth (Bhūdevī), on his boar's tusk from the bottom of the cosmic ocean to reestablish her upon the waters in the purāṇic cosmogonies.⁸ It is striking that these two myths concern what one might call Śiva's and Viṣṇu's secondary wives rather than their primary wives, Pārvatī and Lakṣmī. But the coincidence explains itself once one looks to its relevance in the shaping of the Gingee terrain. As Śiva tames and regulates the goddess in the form of water, Viṣṇu stabilizes the goddess in the form of the earth. The Gingee land is thus not only watered by a "living" form of the Ganges, but established by a repetition of the stabilization of the earth.

B. The Gold Tree of Gingee

Just as the river has its distinctive regional mythology, so has the founding of the Gingee Fort and the kingdom. Indeed, in the more recent of the two accounts of the origins of the river, the stories flow directly from the one to the other. According to the traditions mentioned by Jagadisa Ayyar and Srinivasachari, when Tupakkal Krishnappa Naick followed the boar from Kanchipuram to Singavaram and was told by the deity to build him a temple, the king raised a new question: how was he to do so?

It was in response to this question that Viṣṇu ordered him to serve an ascetic who lived close by in the hills. The ascetic had a magic plant: one needed only to boil its leaves in a large cauldron, throw in a holy man, and the latter's body would turn to gold. When the Nāyak appeared before the ascetic, the ascetic determined to sacrifice him and made preparations accordingly. But the Nāyak suspected his intentions and threw him into the pot instead.

7. It is possible that the two names refer to two separate sources of the river, as in the case of the Ganges: one (Badrinath) connected with Viṣṇu, another (Kedarnath) connected with Śiva (there is also Gangotri). One notes that the story concerning Viṣṇu as the boar has the Varāhanadī flow from the northwest, whereas the main source of the "Caṅkarāparaṇi" flows from the southwest (see just to the west of Gingee on map 2).

8. On the single tusk or horn, an image of both the sacrificial stake (the lime on the tusk is thus a symbol of impalement) and the cosmic pillar, see Defourny 1976, 19–22. On the distinction between Viṣṇu's roles as cosmogonic boar and avatāric boar, see Biardeau 1981c, 51 n. 1, and Hildebeitel 1980b, 111 n. 30 (with citations).

The king discovered that when he cut off one of the ascetic's golden limbs, it would grow back the next day. With this inexhaustible treasure, he then built the Singavaram temple and the Gingee Fort. Finally, he threw the golden corpse into the Ceṭṭikulam, the largest tank in the Gingee Fort complex, "where it is still said to remain" (mainly from Srinivasachari 1943, 25–26 n.; cf. Jagadisa Ayyar 1982a, p. 183: "It is also said that the golden carcass was hidden in a secret place and that it exists today, though the place cannot be identified by anyone").

Despite the fact that Jagadisa Ayyar and Srinivasachari tell the same story, there are enough differences in their accounts for us to be confident that their versions were gathered separately, probably both from oral sources. But whatever their provenance, it would seem that the story has been fashioned by the stringing together of two tales that were originally distinct: one, as we have seen, concerning the river, the other the kingdom. Indeed, the Tupakkal Krishnappa Naick story also synthesizes its historical allusions, evoking both Pallava antiquities (Kanchipuram and the Singavaram temple) and the period of the Nāyaks. In both older and more recently recorded versions of the second part of the story, there is no connection made with the myth of the origins of the river. Nor is there any reference to the Singavaram temple, which clearly serves as a link between the river episode and the kingdom episode. Moreover, the story is told of a different king.

In the most venerable version of the origin of the kingdom, that of Nārāyaṇaṇ Pillai, the hero is the shepherd-king Āṇanta Kōṇ, who according to local tradition founded the first dynasty at Gingee "between" the Pallava and Nāyak periods in about 1190. Indeed, for Nārāyaṇaṇ Pillai, the story of the founding of this "shepherd dynasty" is Āṇanta Kōṇ's most distinctive myth.⁹ Nevertheless, the story has been told in very different ways. In what follows I will concentrate first on the historically self-conscious Mackenzie manuscript account of Nārāyaṇaṇ Pillai, who claimed descent from Āṇanta Kōṇ himself, and then examine an oral account recorded in December 1981 at the Gingee Fort from a young Muslim employed there as a groundskeeper by the fort's present-day conservers, the Archaeological Survey of India.¹⁰

9. See chapter 2 above. On traditions of kingdoms founded by pastoral peoples, including the Kōṇs of Gingee, see Sontheimer 1976, 152–62, 247; 1984, 163.

10. It is the richest of the oral accounts collected. Muslims in present-day Gingee are as familiar with the local traditions concerning the fort as are Hindus (see Hildebeitel 1985c).

In Nārāyaṇaṇ Pillai's account, the river and the kingdom are still connected, though only loosely. The story of Āṇanta Kōṇ occurs "in that place"—on the Kamalagiri, the mountain or the rock fort that Āṇanta Kōṇ will rename the Ānandagiri, and Tubākki Krishnappa, the Rājagiri.

Āṇanta Kōṇ, a shepherd of Gingee, went to pasture his goats [āṭu] on the Kamalagiri Mountain. Near the summit he found a large cave covered with the foliage of a creeper called *cālakkoti*. Ten of his animals, grazing on this plant, reached the summit without Āṇanta Kōṇ knowing it. When he got up to look for them, they had disappeared. So he went home with the rest of his flock. Some time later, he returned with his goats to the same mountain, and was overjoyed to see fifty goats on the peak. He was convinced that they had multiplied from his own. Lifting himself to the top by the *cālakkoti* creepers, he spied ten large springs, and near one of them an ascetic [tapasi]. The latter addressed him: "O herdsman [kōṇārē], you have found me in order that this mountain become a fort and the earth [pūmi] be celebrated. Listen. Do you see a banyan tree [ālamaram] about an hour away? At the foot of this tree you will find riches for the construction of the fort. . . . Take them. Enter the hollow of this rock and look carefully. There is a golden statue. Take that also." Then he blessed the herdsman and instantly disappeared [māyamāyp pōṇār]. Āṇanta Kōṇ did as he was told, fortified the mountain, incorporated the village of Mēlaccēri within Gingee, and defeated the kings of the surrounding districts. (From Dikshitar 1952, 16–17; Diagou 1939, 12–14)

One will note certain striking differences between our two present accounts: in one it is a Nāyak "king" who follows the god Viṣṇu on a sort of royal boar hunt; in the other it is a lowly shepherd who follows his goats. Yet it is clearly the "same" story. In both cases, the animals lead the heroes to a cave where they encounter the mysterious being who discloses the riches that will make them kings of Gingee by building the Gingee Fort. One will recognize here two local variants of a very ancient and widespread legend of the origins of kingship in which an animal, or animals, lead a future king deep into a forest to the "source" of Sovereignty (there is usually, as in the Āṇanta Kōṇ legend, a spring of water).¹¹ "Sovereignty" is sometimes represented by a boon-bestowing god, but

11. There is actually a spring-fed pool atop the Rājagiri that is accessible through crevices amid the huge boulders.

more often it is personified either as a highly ambivalent maiden (whom a kiss will transform from a hag to a ravishing beauty) or an equally ambiguous ascetic.¹² Here the ambiguity of the ascetic is evident in the strikingly different destinies that are accorded him in the two versions: in one the hero must kill him to obtain the gold; in the other the ascetic blesses the hero with the means to the gold before disappearing.¹³ It seems likely, taking all the known variants into account, that this difference is primarily a function of the relation between the ascetic and the deity. Where the story concerns either the ascetic or the deity alone, neither is sacrificed,¹⁴ although the golden statue in Nārāyaṇaṇ Pillai's version looks rather like a double for the vanishing *tapasi*. But where it concerns both an ascetic and a deity (or deities), as in the first account and the version that follows, the ascetic becomes in some fashion the "first king's" first victim in an offering that the deity in question seems to require before the fort can be built and the kingdom established.

This brings us, then, to the version I recorded at Gingee on 6 December 1981.

Before there was a fort at Gingee, the area was a forest. A sage named Taṭikkāra Virappaṇ was living here, worshipping the Seven Virgins [*Elukkannimār*]. All seven had appeared to the sage in a single form, urging him to do a one-hundred-and-eight-day pūjā at the Ceṭṭikuḷam. On the hundred and first day, he went to the tank at a time inappropriate for a human, between noon and 1 P.M., and saw the goddesses bathing there. Their wrath aroused, the goddesses determined not to let him finish his lengthy pūjā, and disappeared to the eight directions. They then appeared in the dream of a shepherd (Kōṇār), who had access to a special tree called the "every day sprouting tree" [*aṇru tuḷuttāṇ maram*].¹⁵ When one

12. Hiltebeitel 1976a, 143–91; the closest examples involving ascetics are, perhaps significantly, from Sri Lanka (*ibid.*, 181–84) and Vijayanagar (see Sewell 1900, 18–23, 299: in one example, the first king, Bukha, is a shepherd). The theme also has a biblical counterpart in the story of Saul and his father's asses (1 Sam. 9). On "first king" legends, see Dumézil 1973; Eliade 1970, 131–63.

13. In the variants requiring a sacrifice before the fort can be constructed, there are elements of the *Bauopfer* ("Construction Sacrifice") theme; for a rich discussion, cf. Eliade 1970, 164–90.

14. Thus in one account, Āṇanta Kōṇ, following his stray flocks, meets a Mahā-puruṣa (Viṣṇu again?) who informs him that Gingee will thrive if he gets the support of the Nāyak of Tanjore to found the kingdom; see Edwardes 1926, 1–2, an account apparently originally from the Mackenzie Collection but at some point separated from it.

15. Or "just that day sprouting tree": *tuḷuttu*, "sprouting," is a colloquial alternate for *tuḷirttu*, from *tuḷir*, "to sprout or bud."

cut its leaves or branches, they replaced themselves over night. Moreover, it was a property of the tree's leaves, branches, and stems that if anything alive were thrown with them into fire, it would become gold. The goddesses instructed the shepherd to put some of the leaves into the sage's fire, and to kill him by pushing him into it. The shepherd did as told, and the sage became solid gold. With the gold from the sage's body and from other creatures transformed into gold by the same method, the shepherd built the Gingee Fort.

My informant did not volunteer the shepherd's name. But it is likely that the founding of the fort remains the work of Ānanta Kōṇ. Let us note, however, that Nārāyaṇaṇ Piḷḷai also gives us a very abbreviated version of the myth of Taṭikkāra Virappaṇ and the Seven Virgins that is set before his myth of the founding of the fort, and that has no role for any shepherd. This account tells how the Seven Virgins committed suicide after an attack on their chastity by an unnamed king, and how, after they received some unspecified help (*ottācai*) from Taṭikkāra Virappaṇ (now an unblemished hero-devotee), they performed acts of power and came to be regarded as the deities of the Gingee Fort (Dikshitar 1952, 14; Diagou 1939, 7; cf. Srinivasachari 1943, 22). One senses a discordance in this ending, as we have seen that Nārāyaṇaṇ Piḷḷai saves the building of the fort for Ānanta Kōṇ. But this reinforces the impression that Ānanta Kōṇ must be the shepherd who builds the fort in the 1981 version, which clearly coalesces the two stories that Nārāyaṇaṇ Piḷḷai treated separately. In any case, this local account is rich in new details. As remarked above, one suspects that in the stories where the ascetic is killed, it is at the behest of a deity. In the variants gathered by Jagadisa Ayyar and Srinivasachari, the deity is Viṣṇu-Raṅganātha of Singavaram. We shall soon see that at least in the *Mahābhārata* there is nothing surprising in having Viṣṇu, or his *avatāra*, instigate a sacrifice. But where he does so, he collaborates with the goddess, even making her his instrument. In this regard, it is fitting once again to recall the Singavaram temple's niche for Durgā Mahiṣāsūramardini. There, in an early example of a Pallava iconic tableau, which we shall speak of again in chapter 15, the goddess stands on the buffalo's severed head and is worshipped by kneeling suppliants, one of whom holds the point of a knife to his wrist, offering the goddess his own blood (Srinivasan 1964, 115 and pl. 32A; Seshadri 1963, pl. 14B).

I cannot, of course, insist that the version of the story involving Tupakkal Krishnappa Naick and Viṣṇu the boar is connected with Durgā. It is Viṣṇu alone who prompts the "service" to the ascetic

that results in the latter's death. I can only state the possibility as a suspicion. In any case, in the version gathered in 1981, the role of the goddess—this time with no mention of Viṣṇu—is strikingly clear. It is the goddess, or rather the seven goddesses who can appear as many or as one, who demands the sage's sacrifice. The seven in fact make their demand for a reason that reappears in countless goddess myths and variants: the violation of the goddess's chastity. Indeed, it is a reason that reappears most notably in versions of the Mahiṣāsūramardana in which the Buffalo Demon tries to seduce the goddess, and in other myths similarly intertwined with the buffalo sacrifice (see Hildebeitel 1980a, 194, n. 38; 1982b, 88–90).¹⁶

In fact, the Seven Virgins who require “the shepherd” to kill the ascetic are none other than the seven goddesses (or sisters) who are currently worshipped at a buffalo sacrifice that still takes place at Gingee Fort. Indeed, the story of the ascetic and the “every day sprouting tree” was told to illustrate the goddesses' roles in this ceremony. This Gingee Fort buffalo sacrifice, which I observed in May, 1984 (see Hildebeitel 1985c), occurs on the ninth day of a ten-day festival following the Amāvāsyā (new moon day) of Cittirai (April-May).¹⁷ It is thus a spring Navarātra, which, though it is today in many ways a “village” buffalo sacrifice, is probably also the continuation or prolongation of a ceremony once performed by the Gingee rājas.

As a group, the seven goddesses are still said to guard the fort, and each of the seven has a temple within the area. But three of the seven stand for the rest as the immediate recipients of the actual sacrifice: two of them, Kamalakkaṇṇiyammaṇ (also called Ceṇciyamman) and Kāliyamman (Kālī), whose temples are within the fort, and one, Māriyamman, who represents the town.¹⁸ Accord

16. E.g., *Vāmana Purāṇa* 20–21; see also Gopinatha Rao 1971, 1: 348–54, citing also a *Varāha Purāṇa* variant; and Shulman 1980a, 179. In the *Devī Māhātmyam* (5.117–21 ff.), the seduction scene falls, not to Mahiṣa, but to Śumbha and Niśumbha (Jagadisvarananda 1972, 84–85). Because the stories are otherwise so close, it would seem that the *Vāmana Purāṇa* version has transferred this role to Mahiṣa.

17. The timing does not seem to be absolute. At Mēlaccēri I was informed that the Gingee Fort festival occurs for ten days over the end of Cittirai and the beginning of Vaikāci.

18. The other four goddesses mentioned are Tenṇiyammaṇ, Paccaiyammaṇ, Pūvatammaṇ, and Celliyammaṇ. Nārāyaṇaṇ Piḷḷai (Dikshitar 1952, 14; Diagou 1939, 10), however, has a different list: Ceṇciyamman, Kamalan (Kamalakkanni), Celli (Celliyammaṇ), Pūvi (Pūvatammaṇ?), Pacci Ariyan (Paccaiyammaṇ?), Karuppanna, and Muttammai (perhaps Muttu Māriyamman, but in a different location, northeast of the Krishnagiri rather than in Gingee town, and with her temple facing north). Informants sometimes included Draupadī, but this may have been to satisfy my interests.

ingly, one male buffalo (*erumaik kaṭā*) is sacrificed beside an old and withered *kāṭṭuvākai* tree (a variety of the flowering *Mimosa flexuosa*) at a point near the fort granary and main gate at the base of the Ānandagiri (or Rājagiri). This point is said to mark the fort's border (*ellai*). A second buffalo is then offered within minutes at a cross-roads on the way to the Māriyamman temple. Moreover, once the two buffaloes are sacrificed, the icons (actually *karakams*) of Kamalakkanniyamman (who is the main goddess of the fort) and Māriyamman are brought together in a scene of great festivity so that the two "sisters" can meet, "kiss," and romp about together, and in effect ritually affirm an underlying identity that is repeatedly stressed by informants: that all seven—virgins, sisters, and goddesses—are one and the same.

There are important reasons why each of these three goddesses is evoked differentially: Māriyamman in connection with the town, Kāliyamman in connection with scenes of possession and blood-drinking, and Kamalakkanniyamman in connection with the fort. But insofar as it is essentially a buffalo sacrifice associated with the royal fort, it is centered primarily on Kamalakkanniyamman. It is her weapon—a silver *cūlam*, or trident—that is brought down from her temple and made symbolically present for the actual sacrifices. In all this, it is clear that Kamalakkanni is linked primarily with Durgā. The buffalo sacrifices transpose into ritual Durgā's feat of killing the Buffalo Demon. In fact Kamalakkanniyamman is a form of Durgā as goddess of forts (*durkai*, Sanskrit *durgā*, means "the inaccessible," and is a term for "fort"). And the festival, as a spring Navarātra, is itself ultimately a festival of Durgā. It is thus Kamalakkanniyamman as Durgā who allows us to define the unity of the seven goddesses.

Concerning Kamalakkanniyamman, one is informed not only by the current festival, but by her traditional iconography. Her temple, located halfway up the south side of the Rājagiri just below the massive cliffs that jut up to its peak, has facing it, in the position of an offering stone, or *bali-piṭham*, a large rounded stone slab (about three-and-a-half by four-and-a-half feet) on which are incised a bow, five arrows, and the heads of a buffalo, a ram, and four humans. Srinivasachari, familiar with the annual buffalo sacrifices performed earlier in this century at Gingee, infers that these incised heads "refer to the sacrifices of men and animals that were practiced" there (1943, 5). He is surely on the right track, at least as regards the animals.

This combination of human and animal heads points us toward one of the central themes of the royal buffalo sacrifice. The sacrificial

animal is offered on behalf of the king. Yet the model for the animal sacrifice—whether it is symbolic or literal—is the sacrifice of a human being. It can be no accident that in the myth of the origins of the Gingee Fort, the first sacrifice that takes place, the one that makes the construction of the fort possible, is one that provides the required human model. It is the same goddess—or goddesses—now receiving the offerings of buffaloes, who originally instituted her own royal cult by the exemplary sacrifice of the sage Taṭikkāra Vīrappaṇ. More than this, Āṇanta Kōṇ, “the shepherd,” as the first king of Gingee, also fulfills the role in the legend of the first royal sacrificer (*yajamāna*). Let us also note that his ascetic victim would seem to be a forest-dwelling Brahman.

In this light, it is of the highest interest that the fruit of the exemplary sacrifice is not simply a kingdom, but one built with inexhaustible riches. Here we have a remarkable double symbolism involving the ascetic and the tree. I have cited three accounts in which an ascetic provides the first king of Gingee with a golden statue. In two of them, the statue is the ascetic himself, while in the third the ascetic points the way to a statue and immediately disappears. In the first account, the ascetic’s body turns to gold when he is pushed into a fire with the leaves of a miraculous tree; in the other, when it is boiled with the leaves of a magic plant. In the latter account there is also the additional detail that the golden limbs of the ascetic’s corpse replace themselves, a theme that in other variants belongs more precisely to the “every day sprouting tree.” As with the ascetic’s limbs, the tree is indeed sometimes said to yield gold from its self-replenishing branches. But in the full versions cited, the gold is found at its base, or is derived from its leaves, or the leaves of a “magic plant.”

The botanical identity of this tree is specified in only one account, that of Nārāyaṇaṇ Piḷḷai, who describes it as a banyan. But Nārāyaṇaṇ Piḷḷai, perhaps in his quest for historical verisimilitude, has clearly fragmented the story at its most crucial point. Not only are the ascetic and the golden statue given separate identities, but the tree is said to be found about an hour away at a spot where it had apparently, in Nārāyaṇaṇ Piḷḷai’s time, been locally identified, in a form that deprives it of its most mythically and ritually significant feature: the gold-producing leaves.¹⁹

19. Thus Nārāyaṇaṇ Piḷḷai indicates the tree had been located in the place now occupied by the village of Poṇpatti, its name derived from *poṇ-perra*, being the place where Āṇanta Kōṇ “obtained gold” (Dikshitar 1952, 17). There is a Draupadī temple at Poṇpatti (which I visited in February 1982) that holds an eighteen-day festival once every three years.

But there is no reason to expect a botanical identification of an "every day sprouting tree." It can only be identified in relation to themes of myth and ritual, for there is little doubt that the tree evoked—or more exactly the tree whose mythology has been given this local form—is once again the *śamī* or *vaṇṇi*. As Biardeau has shown (in press), many trees, including the banyan and especially the margosa, serve as substitutes for the rare *śamī* in rituals. All are "female" trees in relation to "male" trees like the *aśvattha* or peepul and palm. The important point, however, is that the *śamī* and certain of its substitutes are specifically associated with gold. Generally, the *śamī* has a traditional association with gold that is found in the Vedic ritual *sūtras* (see Biardeau; in press, citing *Āpastamba Śrauta Sūtra* 5.29), springing from a pan-Indian notion that gold is a solid form of fire. It will thus be recalled that it is by putting the "every day sprouting tree" leaves in fire that the kingdom's gold is produced. Similarly, the *śamī* leaves—or sometimes those of a substitute for the *śamī*, the *āpaṭā* or *apta* (*Bauhinia tomentosa*)—may also be identified with gold. These associations are made specifically in the context of the *śamīpūjā* that forms a part of the rites of Navarātra and Dasarā. Thus in Maharashtra, the "popular *śamīpūjā*" consists of people exchanging leaves of *śamī* or *āpaṭā* and exclaiming "it is gold" (Biardeau 1981a, 226–27; Kane [1930–62] 1975, 5: 192). No doubt the "every day sprouting tree" of Gingee is a similar popular transformation of the implicit theme of the *śamīpūjā*, that the kingdom draws its prosperity or gold from the proper fulfillment of these royal rites.

In this regard, there is one more piece of current Gingee area lore that will further confirm the connection of this "every day sprouting tree" with the mythical ideals of the kingdom of Gingee. According to one of the *pāratīyārs* who recites at Draupadī festivals, the gold-producing tree grew again to full height in the time of Rāja Desing. And even now, it still stands in a cave in the Royal Fort. If one could just get inside, he could learn the secret of its self-replenishing leaves and branches. But the cave is now full of bees and insects, so no one will enter.²⁰

20. From B. Kothandarama Goundar, interviewed at Maṅkaḷam, May 1982. Tunnels are also alleged to connect the King's Fort with the Queen's Fort and the former with the Singavaram Rāṅganātha temple.

5

Myths of the Mēlaccēri
Draupadī Temple

The myths of the origin of the river, the fort, and the kingdom are normally told without any reference to Draupadī or her Mēlaccēri temple. But the stories of Draupadī's advent to Gingee (or Mēlaccēri) and the traditions associated with her temple there are thoroughly intertwined with the settings of these myths, and even, as we shall see, with their royal heroes.

A. The Forest at the Northern Boundary

According to the pāratīyār B. Kothandarama Goundar, "everyone in Tamilnadu knows that Draupadī was born in Gingee, two miles from the Caṅkarāparaṇi River." His statement projects a local familiarity with this tradition far beyond the area where it now pertains. As we have seen in chapter 3, the stories that connect Draupadī's second birth with her Mēlaccēri temple are virtually unknown outside the core area and, more particularly, outside the circles in which such traditions have been kept alive regionally by transmission within her cult. Yet where these traditions are known, they are set forth vividly. According to a Draupadī temple officiant and local school teacher at Nallāṇpettāl, "Gingee is Draupadī's *avatāra*." And according to an informant at Mutikai Nallāṅkuppam (a hamlet of the temple town of Tirukkalukkunram, Chingleput District), "Gingee is the same as Hāstinapura," the Kaurava capital in the *Mahābhārata*. I will have more to say about such transpositions. But for now let us note that although there is a certain broad consensus on such matters within the cult, there is a considerable discordance between what one hears about Draupadī's "temple of origins" from informants outside the immediate Gingee-Mēlaccēri area and what one learns about it on the spot.

First, concerning common ground, there is the practice of consecrating new Draupadī temples either by having Draupadī's main

image made of stone brought from Gingee or by having it installed on Gingee soil (see Frasca 1984, 140). Meyer (1984, 61, 73) reports a similar practice in the Aṅkālamman cult, with soil brought from the temple at Mēl Malaiyaṇūr (Gingee Taluk; see also chap. 3, n. 15). The Draupadī cult rite is confirmed at Mēlaccēri. Soil is taken either from Mēlaccēri's Pallava-period Maṭṭilēśvara temple or from the Draupadī temple itself. In the Draupadī temple, a brick and earthen altar, an *ōmakunṭam* (Sanskrit *homakunḍa*), is made in the Pōttu Rāja maṇḍapa (see plate 2) for a fire sacrifice (*yākam*), and the soil is molded into an image of Pillaiyār (Gaṇeśa), set on the bricks, and decorated to the tune of a hundred and eight mantras. In return for ten *virakaṇ* (said to have been the currency in the Pāṇḍavas' time; a *virakaṇ* equals three-and-a-half rupees), the pūcāri then hands over the Gaṇeśa in a piece of turmeric-dyed cloth to be placed under Draupadī's icon in her new temple. As we shall see, the soil is thus linked with the sacrifice that resulted in Draupadī's Gingee birth and with Gaṇeśa, the god who removes obstacles at new beginnings.

Numerous temples in the core area claim to have brought their sand or stone "from Gingee," though nowhere else were the details of the ceremony still recalled. Rather, if one hears anything, it is likely to be a story connecting some unique feature of the local Draupadī icon, or temple, with the Gingee Draupadī's prestige. At Cuddalore, her image near the Tiruppātirippuliyūr railway station was brought when the temple's Vaṇṇiyar founders migrated there from Gingee "a thousand years ago" (the temple is certainly not that old). At Nallāṇpettāl, where there are "three figures of Amman" (Draupadī) in the cella, the central one has no sculpted features like the others. It is a sort of "self-born" (*svayambhū*) image, the stone, said to come from Gingee, representing Draupadī in her natural form. At Pondicherry, the most treasured metal image of Draupadī was found buried in the ground at Gingee after its location had been revealed in a dream to an ancestor, nine generations back, of the head of the family that now administers the temple (Shideler 1987, 66, 82, 104).

More rarely one finds a legend, as at Vīrapāṇṭi:

Seven generations ago, the ancestors of the present pūcāri—a husband and wife—had gone to a small village near Gingee [Mēlaccēri?]. When they stopped there, they placed a basket on a large stone. To their surprise, they saw a stone in the basket. Thinking they had unwittingly been carrying it, and that it was after all only a stone, they threw it into the Caṅkarāparaṇi. Next day, having gone to another village, they

again set the basket down; and to their surprise, when they looked into it, the stone was back in the basket but this time in the shape of Draupadī. This miracle convinced them to bring it back home to Virapāṇṭi and to consecrate it in the Draupadī temple there.

The Virapāṇṭi temple has two Amman images; the other—the larger one—was discovered in a Ponnaiyar River bund after a dream. It seems that the larger one is the older image, and that the one brought in the basket was installed beside it in an already existing temple. In any case, the image from the “small village near Gingee” is again a sort of svayaṃbhū, this time given human form by a rebirth through the Caṅkarāparaṇi River.

These and other such ties with Draupadī of Gingee do not, as one can see, rely on any steady, current contact with the Mēlaccēri temple. In fact, it would seem likely that as Gingee’s renown and centrality have been eclipsed, ongoing contact with the Mēlaccēri temple has diminished. This loss of prominence would seem to be one of the factors behind the following story, which retains Draupadī’s connection with Gingee but which also gives Gingee a new location:

About a hundred and fifty years ago the people at Ēṇātērimaṅkaḷam village [Cuddalore Taluk, South Arcot District, about twenty-five miles northwest of Panruti] were drying the leaves of the *avuri* plant [a medicinal plant; its extract is also used in chemicals for textiles]. But it looked like rain, so the women all removed their baskets. But one old lady said, “No. Leave my basket alone, it won’t rain. Let the leaves dry.” Where the old lady stood, it did not rain, but the rain fell all around her. That same night a small girl spoke under *āvēcam* [possession]: “I came with that old lady: I came from North Gingee village [*vaṭaceṇṇippaṭṭi*], not from South Arcot Gingee. I would like to settle down here.” It was Śakti who spoke through the little girl. And so it is that Draupadī comes from North Gingee, not from South Arcot Gingee.

It is noteworthy that this story associates the founding of a Draupadī temple with a local possession rather than with the bringing of stone or soil from Gingee. Possibly, as the story itself seems to suggest, temple origin legends of this type increase as the links with Gingee decrease. Two Draupadī temples on the northern fringe of the core area in Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh, record foundations of this type: one through possession (again during a rain-storm), the other in a dream (Chandra Sekhar 1961d, 7, 10). Sim-

ilarly, the venerable Ramalinga Goundar, the hundred-and-two-year-old grandfather of the current chief trustee of the older of the two Maṅkaḷam Draupadī temples, combines the dream and the rainstorm miracle in a cherished story of his boyhood. When he was about ten, his own father ordered thirty thousand bricks for the construction of the temple, paying a Ceṭṭiyār merchant in advance. They were cut and set out to dry, but that very night the village was flooded by rains. His father, sure that the bricks had been washed away, lost all hope for the building of the temple. But the next morning the Ceṭṭiyār told him that he had dreamt that night of a woman—Draupadī herself—holding a huge umbrella over the bricks during the storm. When they went to the place, all the bricks were dry and intact, while the surrounding area was flooded. Ramalinga Goundar's story is about the bricks for the new temple, not the consecration of its icon, so the fact that he makes no mention of Gingee, only about thirty miles away, is perhaps not significant. But the avuri plant story was recalled by N. M. Adikeshava Bharatiyar—about thirteen years after visiting Ēṇātēr-imaṅkaḷam—to support his version of the Gingee Draupadī cycle in which he persistently locates the action in North India. I will return to this problem, but I note for the moment that he takes a rather unusual position on matters of geography.¹

Our problem, then, is that the Gingee of Draupadī cult myth and ritual has little consistent relation to the real Gingee (and Mēlaccēri) that one finds today. Of the numerous informants questioned outside of Gingee who knew about the Mēlaccēri (or more often "Gingee") temple, few had ever been there: probably, in fact, only my two main Terukkūttu informants, who twice performed there, and perhaps a few of the pāratīyārs. This did not, however, prevent people from describing the place, and in the most bewilderingly conflicting terms. Was the temple at Mēlaccēri, Gingee town, or even the Gingee Fort? And if the latter, was it inside the fort or outside of it? Did it face east or north? Was it east or west

1. Not only does he take literally the Gingee-Hāstinapura parallelism mentioned earlier (locating North Gingee about two hundred kilometers north of Delhi, i.e., in the general area of Hāstinapura), but he relocates the entire mythology of Gingee to this fictional North Gingee, and thus empties the real Gingee of any living sacrality. Furthermore, in an interview in May 1984, he identified Paṅcaladeśa, Draupadī's epic country of birth, as South Africa, and Nāgaloka as America. Others also speak of a "northern Gingee," probably on the model of the "northern Madurai" (Mathura) and "southern Madurai" (see chap. 10). But the only other informant to mention such a place "near Delhi"—the pāratīyār Venkatesha Bhagavatar—insisted that it is still the South Arcot Gingee that is the setting for the stories of Draupadī's second advent.

of the Caṅkarāparaṇī? On the river's bank or several miles away? All of these contradictory descriptions were offered at one time or another. They are clearly pieces of a fractured regional folklore that has outlasted any current contact or familiarity with the site.

Such descriptions did, of course, have the initial effect of making it rather a challenge to find this temple. Among the first informants questioned, none mentioned Mēlaccēri, and nothing contradicted what was then my only known reference to the temple in a scholarly source: Srinivasachari's footnote, summarizing a passage from Nārāyaṇaṇ Pillai's "History of Gingee" from the Mackenzie manuscripts, that it was Tubākki Krishnappa Nāyak who "built the temple dedicated to Dharmarāja and Draupadī Ammaṇ at the north end of Gingee town" (1943, 88n). Upon arrival at Gingee, I thus expected to find the temple within the town, as described. But the first local farmer questioned at the Gingee bazaar set the matter straight: there is no Draupadī temple in Gingee proper; the only one is in Mēlaccēri, to which he pointed the way. There is no accounting for Srinivasachari's mistaken description. It is based, as we shall see, simply on a misreading of the Mackenzie manuscript, one that can probably be explained only by assuming that he never made careful inquiries at Mēlaccēri, despite being well aware that it is known as Old Gingee and that its history is repeatedly intertwined with that of Gingee proper (fort and town).²

I will examine Nārāyaṇaṇ Pillai's crucial passage shortly, but first, it must be insisted that the regional folklore about Draupadī's Gingee temple, despite its inaccuracies and contradictions, is not without its treasures. Some of the information can be clarified in relation to the actual temple. Thus one informant, a chapbook-seller at the great Śiva temple at Tiruvannamalai, said flatly that it was not Draupadī who was born at Mēlaccēri but "her mother." He insisted that Draupadī was born at Ceṭṭipālaiyam, a hamlet of Gingee. Back again I went to look for a Draupadī temple in Gingee town, again to no avail. As regards the "mother's" birth at Mēlaccēri, it is possible that this informant was confusing Draupadī's mother with her mother-in-law, Kuntī, who has a statue beside Draupadī's in the Mēlaccēri inner sanctum. But the birth of Draupadī at Ceṭṭipālaiyam finds a perfectly satisfying explanation at Mēlaccēri. During the Draupadī festival there, on the night that celebrates the goddess's birth, her image is brought in procession to Ceṭṭipālaiyam because sponsors of that night's festivities, who

2. On Mēlaccēri in the history of Gingee, see appendix 2, under the dates 588–686, 1190, 1597, 1700–13, 1714; and see also Srinivasachari 1943, 15, 96, 353, 413.

have moved from the village to the town, insist on having it performed at their present residence. Strangely the Mēlaccēri temple thus concedes the ceremonies of Draupadī's birth, for which it is "famous" elsewhere, to this nearby community in Gingee town. No doubt the practice involves a way of retaining ties with a related community. But it also suggests efforts to maintain ritual connections between the Mēlaccēri temple and Gingee.

Regional oral traditions about the "Gingee temple" also hint at connections between it and the Gingee Fort. At Mutikai Nallāṅkuppam, it was said that Draupadī's birthplace is inside the fort, and that her temple is near "Rāja Desing's Durgamma temple." It would seem that this informant has confused the Durgā niche at the Singavaram Raṅganātha temple (Rāja Desing sought the blessing of Raṅganātha before his last fight) with the Kamalakkanniyammaṇ temple in the Gingee Fort. But what is significant is that the Draupadī cult is thereby linked to Gingee's royal mythology and topography. As we shall see, the local mythology of Draupadī at Mēlaccēri is clearly intertwined with stories of royal patronage from the Gingee Fort. Furthermore, there is even a possible survival of a connection between the Draupadī festival at Mēlaccēri and the Gingee Fort buffalo sacrifice. According to its present schedule, the Mēlaccēri temple attempts to hold its festival once every five years, less frequently than it is said to have done in days past. When it does so, the buffalo sacrifice is scheduled to occur after the completion of the Draupadī festival. Thus in 1982, the firewalk at Mēlaccēri occurred 10 May, and the buffalo sacrifice on 12 May. It is possible that this arrangement goes back to an earlier period. Indeed, it is more likely that the Draupadī festival retains such a link from days when it was performed more regularly than that it has forged such a link in its days of decreased performance.

But what is the relation between the Mēlaccēri temple and the Gingee Fort? One more piece of regional folklore deserves mention. According to the informants at the Mutikai Nallāṅkuppam temple who located Draupadī's temple inside the fort, there is a feature of their own temple that it shares uniquely with that of "Gingee." In both, the shrines face, not east, as at most temples, but north. Now the Draupadī temple at Mutikai Nallāṅkuppam does face north. Curiously, Meyer (1984, 72) also found one informant who claimed that Ankāḷammaṇ temples should face north, though this too was irregular. But the Mēlaccēri Draupadī temple faces east. Nevertheless, as we have seen in Srinivasachari's misinterpretation of Nārāyaṇaṇ Pillai's description of the Gingee temple, there is a

link between the Mēlaccēri temple and the “north of Gingee.” It is now time to turn once again to Nārāyaṇaṇ Piḷḷai’s “History of Gingee”: this time to his account of the founding of the Mēlaccēri temple, which he attributes to the reign of Tubākki Krishnappa, the effective founder of the line of Gingee Nāyaks (ca. 1509–1521).

It was to that king [Tubākki Krishnappa] that Draupadī-ammaṇ, revealing herself [*piratti(ya)kṣamāy*], showed the hair in the flower that had been fastened to her [icon]. From that day, appointing Rāja Gopālaṇ [a Kōṇār] as trustee [of the temple: *tarmakarttā*], building a Dharmarāja-Draupadī temple on the northern boundary of Gingee [*ceñcikkū vaṭakku mukanaiyil*], and digging a tank, having granted hereditary rights and emoluments [*mirācu*] to that Ammaṇ in the kingdom under his rule, establishing [or creating] it as the premier [or original] temple [*āti kōvilā unṭu paṇṇi*], he made arrangements, as per custom, that respect [*mariyātai*] in all temples be given to the trustee of that [Dharmarāja-Draupadī] temple. From the Coleroon to Tirupati, emoluments were made to that Ammaṇ. A descendant of those trustees, Appacāmi Piḷḷai, is an important pūcāri [*periya pūcāri*] down to today. (Dikshitar 1952, 25; cf. the confused translation of Diagou 1939, 31)

This passage, which I have alluded to several times, opens many unexpected vistas. One may assume that Nārāyaṇaṇ Piḷḷai has incorporated his account of the founding of the Mēlaccēri Draupadī temple into his history of Gingee because of its importance within local Kōṇār traditions, which he knew well being a Kōṇār himself. His account is thus invaluable for giving us a purchase on early nineteenth-century traditions that are, as we shall see, still known and maintained in variant forms today. Indeed, they are preserved most authoritatively by the current Mēlaccēri temple pūcāri, Adikeshava Piḷḷai, who, like Nārāyaṇaṇ Piḷḷai’s contemporary, the “important pūcāri” Appacāmi Piḷḷai, is recognized as the descendant of a continuous line of Kōṇār pūcāris going back to the temple’s origins: origins that differ in their historical referent, but that retain what is mythically essential.

The first matter of note in Nārāyaṇaṇ Piḷḷai’s account is the clarification it provides of what is meant by Draupadī’s temple being to the north of Gingee. It is not that the temple is “at the north end of Gingee town.” No such temple exists. Rather, the temple is on the northern boundary of Gingee as a royal capital:

more or less due north, in fact, of the royal fort on the Rājagiri (see map 3).³ That at least is how we must take Nārāyaṇaṇ Piḷḷai's description: in the early nineteenth century, the Mēlaccēri temple was perceived by the Kōṇārs who preserved its "history"—in effect, its *sthālapurāṇa*—as being built on "the northern boundary of Gingee" at the time when Gingee was refounded as a kingdom by the first of its great Nāyaks.

This "original temple" (*āti kōvil*) is thus the prototype for other Draupadī temples that, as Biardeau (in press) has recognized, are frequently "limit" or "boundary temples," whose location relative to a town or village is more often than not defined by the residential sector occupied by the main caste that worships the goddess. In this regard there is no general requirement that Draupadī temples be associated with the northern boundary. In fact, it is widely the case that Draupadī temples are found to the west of the main agglomeration, as at Tindivanam (where, perhaps significantly, the Draupadī temple is located on the westward-heading Gingee Road).⁴ But no normative directional pattern can be stated, as there are also Draupadī temples to the north and east of certain towns and villages.⁵ In her directional adaptability, Draupadī remains primarily a caste goddess rather than a boundary goddess as such.⁶ But what is striking is that in Draupadī's case, irrespective of local variations, there is a definite directional orientation provided by her "temple of origins," the temple that supplies her with her regional identity and, as we shall see, her regional mythology. This direction is, of course, the north. And where Draupadī has this orientation, as at Gingee, she is assimilated to Kālī, the goddess most regularly associated with the northern direction in Tamil villages.

There will be numerous occasions to note Draupadī's affinities with Kālī. For the moment, however, it must suffice to indicate

3. My pocket compass indicated the fort was almost due south of the temple. The latter cannot be made out from the Royal Fort with the naked eye, as it is tucked beneath a ridge connecting two rocky hills.

4. Other temples to the west include the Mēlaccēri temple relative to Mēlaccēri village, one of two Draupadī temples at Pūṇamalli (the other being to the east), and Mutikai Nallāṅkuppam.

5. Temples to the north of towns and villages include those at Vellimēṭupettaṭai, Pakkiriṭṭālaiyam, Anmarutai, and probably Pondicherry. A southern situation, more rare, can be cited at the "Forest Draupadī-Ammaṇ Temple" south of Tiruvannamalai.

6. One may thus contrast her with Ellaiyammaṇ, the exemplary "boundary" (*ellai*) goddess of Tamilnadu, as well as with other goddesses usually connected with specific directions: e.g., Māriyammaṇ with the village center, Kāliyammaṇ with the north, Paccaivāliyammaṇ with the east (Pon Kothandaraman, personal communication).

their significance with regard to the Gingee-Mēlaccēri temple. As goddess of the northern boundary of Gingee, Draupadī bears a remarkable and telling resemblance to Cellattāmman-Celliyamman, "the goddess of the northern gate" of Madurai as well as of other villages and towns of southern Tamilnadu and apparently Kongunad.⁷ According to van den Hoek, Cellattāmman is herself "a form of Kālī." Fierce and virginal, her small temple is located at Madurai "just within the northern city walls," which were dismantled in the nineteenth century. There, facing north (as Draupadī does at Mutikai Nallānkuppam, and where she is thought to do the same at Gingee), Cellattāmman "is said to defend the northern gate, and thus safeguard Madurai against danger and disease" (van den Hoek 1978, 119).

At least within southern Tamilnadu, this pattern of identifying evils as coming from the north is generalizable. Thus Pate (1917, 110–11) remarks that goddesses who guard the village stand on its boundary and "almost invariably" face north, "whence all calamities come." In fact, the notion is an ancient one, and it is clear from both classical and popular sources that the goddess who wards off calamities is also sometimes the one who brings afflictions with her (see Hildebeitel 1978, 783–85; cf. Reiniche 1979, 174). We will find that Ankālamman takes on one of her most violent aspects, destroying the womb of a pregnant queen at the north side of a royal fort (Meyer 1984, 14, 191). And I am told by P. Kothandaraman that Kālī is sometimes identified with cholera. But we shall discover that the "dangers of the north" are open to multiple associations, including not only diseases but demonic and historical forces as well.

In terms of the affinities between Draupadī as goddess of the northern boundary of Gingee and Cellattāmman as goddess of the northern boundary of Madurai, it is, however, the demon who is crucial. According to van den Hoek, "the stone image of Cellattāmman in the sanctuary of her temple in Madurai represents the goddess as Maḥiṣāsūramardinī, the killer of the buffalo demon" (1978, 120). She does not actually kill Maḥiṣa; rather she is said to hold him prisoner under her right foot. But this is a pose reminiscent of many iconic representations of the victorious Durgā, who

7. See van den Hoek 1978. On Celliyamman, see Reiniche 1979, 26–28; Dumont 1957, 386–88. Cellattā is the family deity (*kuladeva*) and goddess of the "capital" of the kingdom of the Kavunṭar Vēlālar heroes of the *Elder Brothers Story*, but it is not clear whether her temple—obviously a boundary temple—is to the north (see Beck 1982, 15, 459–51). On Celliyamman in southern Chingleput Dt., see Moffatt 1979, 273, and cf. above, chap. 4, n. 18

sets her right foot over the back, head, or snout of the soon-to-be-dispatched demon (see Seshadri 1963, 7–18). Moreover, Cellattāmman is—at least traditionally—the recipient of a buffalo sacrifice on the eighth day of her ten-day festival, a buffalo that, according to the Cellattāmman temple pūcāri, is supplied by the Madurai Mīnākṣī temple (van den Hoek 1978, 125–27; cf. Fuller and Logan 1985, 103).

Not surprisingly, these details of Celattāmman's cult and iconography are linked with a local variant of the goddess's conquest of the Buffalo Demon. Van den Hoek summarizes the myth as follows:

When Isvara and Isvari (Siva and his Spouse) were walking through the primeval forest, Isvari became thirsty, killed a buffalo and drank its blood; finally she decorated herself with its entrails. When Siva found her like that, he did not want to have her in his vicinity any more, but left her with the power to protect the area in which the city of Madurai was to be founded. She had to defend the Northern border with her fierce character. (1978, 120)

This advent of Cellattāmman to Madurai finds unmistakable parallels in the myth of Draupadī's advent to Gingee, which we shall turn to shortly. For the moment, however, let us only note that while Draupadī does not kill a *buffalo* demon, she does kill a demon in a manner that can be traced to the Buffalo Demon's mythology.

Beyond the affinities traceable to the mythology of the buffalo, one finds other exact and significant parallels in the traditions identifying Draupadī and Cellattāmman as "goddesses of the northern boundary." Both are virgins, a point whose unexpectedness in connection with Draupadī we observed in chapter 1. Indeed, in her Mēlaccēri temple, Draupadī's virginal character is accentuated by the unusual feature of having no male figures with her in the *garbhagrha* (see plate 1). Moreover, we shall soon see that Draupadī, like Cellattāmman, is also connected with a sort of primeval forest, which she must clear of its demon so that the Gingee kingdom can be consolidated.⁸ There, again like Cellattāmman, she will assume a protective and yet potentially devouring form, fierce enough to defend the kingdom from the "dangers of the north,"

8. On this forest-clearing theme, linking kingship with the sacrificial cult of the goddess, see Bhattacharya 1981, 19–24; cf. similar themes in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Hiltebeitel 1980a, 200–211).

yet so horrific as to endanger not only her devotees but, in a folk epic reflex, even her husbands. Indeed, the Cellattāmman who drinks the blood of forest animals, decorates herself with entrails, and disquiets her husband Śiva finds a precise counterpart in the dealings of the “forest Draupadī” with animals, demons, and her own husbands, the five Pāṇḍavas. Moreover, just as Śiva leaves Cellattāmman at the northern gate with her power intact to protect the future Madurai, Draupadī is said to live forever in the Mēlaccēri Forest in her “fierce form” (*akōra-uruvam*) as Virapāñcālī (“Heroic Pāñcālī”), guarding her devotees in what remains—in their hearts and regional traditions—of the kingdom of Gingee.

Let us observe that it is specifically in connection with this once royal capital that Draupadī has her fierce, virginal form and her associations with the forest at the northern boundary. Needless to say, we are too far removed from the royal traditions of Madurai and Gingee to know how, or even whether, their ancient kings actually involved themselves in the cults of these northern boundary goddesses. Yet at Gingee, the local lore of the Mēlaccēri temple is insistent that they did: not only in the Nāyak period, but before that in the era of the Kōṇār kings, one of whom, as the next two sections will show, is said to have been the king who invoked the protection of Draupadī’s second advent. One has little reason to doubt such traditions of royal patronage, at least in principle. Possibly Cellattāmman of Madurai could also have received a royal cult, no doubt through intermediaries, and not only in the Nāyak period but even before that by the Pandyas. In any case, it is clearly the royal implications of Draupadī’s “Gingee avatar” that motivate and integrate her regional mythology.

Elsewhere, however, in local temples within the core area (and beyond it), Draupadī’s fierce character as protectress of a kingdom loses the precedence it has at Gingee and is in various ways muted and redefined. Though still often a goddess of village boundaries, she is not regularly connected with the preeminent dangers of the north. And though she is ever a virgin, she usually shares her garbhagr̥ha with one or more of her husbands, most notably Yūdhiṣṭhira or Dharma: an association that implies a dharmic regulation—reenacted at each Draupadī festival—of her fierce form, rendering her locally benign in each village. Something of the same sort seems to occur with Cellattāmman or Celliyamman, as when she is worshipped as “goddess of the northern gate” in the non-royal town of Mel Ceval (Tirunelveli District), retaining her virginity and her associations with the primal forest, but receiving no animal

offerings.⁹ But it is clear that Cellattāmmaṇ-Celliyammaṇ is far more consistently associated with the north and more subject to virginal confinements than Draupadī, whose temples may be found in any of the four directions, and whose cult requires that she be a virgin with the paradoxical complement of husbands and sons who have always shared her story in the *Mahābhārata*.

B. Draupadī, King Cunītaṇ, and the Coming of Pōttu Rāja

Back in 1906, W. Francis determined that the material to which we now turn, and to which we will return in chapters 16 and 17, could be gazetted in the following summary fashion. Outside the Draupadī temples of South Arcot, he noted, "is often a figure of Pothurāja, or the 'king of buffaloes,' a person of ferocious aspect. . . . The stories accounting for his connection with Draupadī are conflicting and puerile, and need not be set out" (Francis 1906, 99). It is significant that Francis found these stories conflicting, for it means that he must have asked about them frequently enough to come up with something similar to the bewildering labyrinth of variants that is still to be found today. It is certainly more than likely that he would have encountered Pōttu Rāja under the alternate name of Pōrmaṇṇaṇ, the "War King," for this second identity of Pōttu Rāja has wide recognition in South Arcot. If only his field notes had survived as well as the stories he so readily dismissed.

I will deal with this total mythology by making a rather drastic partition. In the first part of this book, which focuses on Gingee, I will examine what I will call the Cunītaṇ cycle. In these stories, it is usually under the name of Pōttu Rāja that our hero becomes involved in the myth that in most of its variants accounts for Draupadī's second advent to Gingee. Then in the second part of this study, which will focus on the Draupadī cult's mythology of the *Mahābhārata*, I will examine the stories in which the "same" hero (though even here one must qualify, since occasionally one finds the two names differentiated into two different figures) appears, usually under the name Pōrmaṇṇaṇ, and becomes implicated in the *Mahābhārata* war. It is important to note further that there is a sociological partition between these two cycles, in that the Cunītaṇ stories are usually linked with the more "classicist" and antiquarian interests of the pāratīyārs, while the Pōrmaṇṇaṇ stories are more

9. See Reiniche 1979, 26–28. But Celliyammaṇ has as her guardians a bull-headed Talavay-Karaiyadi-Madan and a "Vetala," figures who would seem to accept blood offerings for her, as Pōttu Rāja and Muttāl Rāvuttaṇ do—one mythically, the other ritually—for Draupadī.

the province of the “popularly” oriented dramas of the Terukkūttu. But here too, no absolute statements are possible. Though the division into two “cycles” is clear and has such a sociological background, it is not pure: the two cycles overlap. Indeed, it is this very overlap of the mythologies of Gingee and the *Mahābhārata*, with Pōttu Rāja-Pōrmannan moving back and forth so freely between them, that provides the clearest markers on the path between Gingee and Kurukṣetra.

I thus leave certain aspects of Pōttu Rāja’s dossier to emerge more fully at later points: most notably his services to other village goddesses beside Draupadī, his diffusion under various guises (not to mention multiforms) throughout most of South India, and his preeminence within the proceedings of Draupadī cult ritual.¹⁰ But I cannot go any further without invoking the profound and sweeping insight of Biardeau that points the way to an explanation of his “Buffalo King” name, and his connections with Mahiṣāsura, the “Buffalo Demon”: “It appears finally undoubtable, because perfectly logical, that Pōta Rāju [the Telugu form of his name that I will adopt] is identical with Mahiṣāsura, but with a Mahiṣāsura who has been converted” (1981a, 238)—converted, that is, by his death at the hands (and feet) of Durgā. This chapter on Pōttu Rāja and Draupadī at Gingee will afford only a glimpse of some of the ramifications of this insight. But when we turn in chapters 16 and 17 to Pōttu Rāja’s services to Draupadī at Kurukṣetra, we will be able to appreciate its full force and its heuristic value for Draupadī cult mythology as a whole. It is in addressing Pōttu Rāja’s varied collaborations with Draupadī that we face the figure who provides the key to the pair of reciprocal questions that guide this study: How does one understand the *Mahābhārata* as the cult myth of a Tamil village, caste, or lineage goddess? And how does one understand such a “village” goddess in the light of the *Mahābhārata*? Pōttu Rāja stands at the nerve center of this Draupadī cult problematic.

To appreciate the Cunītan cycle one must savor the riches that lie in its variants. My procedure will be to begin with the accounts that give the least attention to regional folkloric themes, and to end with those in which such themes are most prominent. This will make it clear that the stories favored by the pārtiyārs are by no means their sole preserve. And it will demonstrate how the “classical” concerns that are typical of the pārtiyārs give way to more

10. See already Biardeau, in press; 1981a, 230–41; also Hildebeitel 1978, 774–75, 789–92; 1982b, 84–91.

vital, colorful, and localized treatments in the improvisations of the Terukkūttu.

Since 1975, I have asked nine pāratīyārs how Pōttu Rāja comes to be associated with Draupadī. Men of several castes (Brahman, Vēlālar Mutaliyār, Vaṇṇiyar, Kōṇār, Nāṭār), and hailing from different parts of the core area, they nonetheless presented a fairly consistent picture.¹¹ All were agreed that Pōttu Rāja makes no appearance in the main story of the *Mahābhārata*, and several were in fact outspokenly critical of the popular stories, fostered especially in the local temples and by the Terukkūttu, which "spoil" the epic by introducing such connections.¹² Rather, claiming in some cases to draw on extra-epic textual tradition, physical evidence of which I was never able to confirm, all but one of them knew variants of the story that accounts for Pōttu Rāja's service to Draupadī in connection with the tribulations of the Pāṇḍavas' descendant King Cūṇṭan.¹³

11. In order of questioning, the nine (including sites and dates interviewed, castes, and native place) are (1) T. Aranganathan, Tindivanam, May 1975, non-Brahman but caste unknown, Tindivanam; (2) T. S. Loganathan, Sowcarpet Draupadī Temple, Madras, June 1975, Brahman, Madras; (3) N. M. Adikeshava Bharatiyar, Veḷḷimē-tupēṭṭai and Aṇmarutai, August 1977 and May 1984, Nāṭār, Nariyampāṭi village (Wandiwash Tk., N. Arcot); (4) V. Venugopala Aiyar, Tindivanam, August 1977, Brahman, Peruṅkattūr village (Cheyyar Tk., N. Arcot); (5) V. M. Brameesa Mudaliyar, Tindivanam and Kanchipuram, August 1981–March 1982, Vēlālar Mutaliyār, Kanchipuram; (6) B. Kothandarama Goundar, Maṅkaḷam, May 1982, Vaṇṇiyar, Nayanampāṭi village (Gingee Tk., S. Arcot); (7) Adikeshava Pillai, Mēlaccēri, May 1982, Kōṇār, Eḷa village (Tindivanam Tk., S. Arcot); (8) M. C. Venkatesha Bhagavata, Nallānpillaipeṇṇāl, May 1984, Vēlālar Mutaliyār, Tirumaṇi (Cheyyar Tk., N. Arcot). The ninth N. Kannapiran, Tepparampaṭṭu village (Gingee Taluk, North Arcot), was met at Mēlaccēri in 1986, but his personal background was not taken.

12. These were the views especially of Aranganathan and Brameesa Mudaliyar.

13. Brameesa Mudaliyar referred to the "text" at different times as *Turōpatai Māṇmiyam* ("Draupadī's Glorification") and *Ceṇci Varalāru* ("The History of Gingee"). It was not clear, however, that he had ever seen such a text, and he could not direct me to one. N. Kannapiran seemed to give the former title a variant twist, citing an unavailable work called *Turōpataiyum Aṇmaiyum*, "Draupadī and Manliness." And a work with Brameesa Mudaliyar's initial title in the Sanskritized form *Draupadī Māhātmyam* was said to be the source of an account by a Ireṭṭiyār (Reddi) informant interviewed by Biardeau (in press) at the Pondicherry Draupadī temple. But this "Glorification" is closer to our Pōrmannaṇ story (see below, chap. 16). Adikeshava Bharatiyar also mentioned a palm-leaf manuscript he had seen about 1970 in the hands of another pāratīyār at Pondicherry. Despite the folkloric titles, there is no reason to doubt that written manuscripts exist. But it is striking that there are apparently no printed "ballad" versions of the Pōttu Rāja (or Pōrmannaṇ) story of the type that exist for other similar guardians of village goddesses (Kattavarāyaṇ, Maturai Viraṇ, Cuṭalai Māṭaṇ). Only Loganathan was unfamiliar with the Pōttu Rāja story. A Madras Brahman, it is likely that he has never been in contact with the rural traditions that sustain the other accounts.

Beginning at the “classicist” pole, the stories of N. M. Adikeshava Bharatiyar and V. Venugopala Aiyar—pāratīyārs from adjoining taluks of North Arcot—are similar enough to be treated together. I follow the former, noting the latter’s departures in brackets.

King Cunītaṇ ruled at Kauśambī [at a place ruled by the Pāṇḍavas’ descendants, name forgotten] five [ten] generations after Arjuna’s great-grandson Janamejaya. Pōttu Rāja was his minister or *mantrin*, a learned Brahman [a *muni*, or sage, and a follower of Śiva]. A demon (*arakkāṇ*) descendant of Bakācuraṇ named Acalamman [Almacan], having a hundred heads [and two hundred hands] repeatedly raided his kingdom, seeking revenge for the slaying of Baka by Bhīma. His boon from some sages [from Brahmā] was that whoever cut off his last head would die when it touched the ground [at which point his hundred heads would all revive]. He could also take on both human and animal forms [denied].

At his elders’ advice, Cunītaṇ sought the aid of Draupadī Parāśakti. He went with Pōttu Rāja to the Himalayas to perform a sacrifice (*yākam*). In their absence from Kauśambī [for one hundred years] the demon defeated Cunītaṇ’s army, learned his plan, and came after him there. When Cunītaṇ saw the demon arrive he preferred suicide by fire to death at his hands. But when he entered the fire the eight-armed Parāśakti Draupadī appeared out of the fire before him. In the ensuing fight the demon turned into a lion and was subdued by Pōttu Rāja [denied]. Draupadī defeated the demon and cut off ninety-nine heads. But before she cut off the last one Cunītaṇ appointed Pōttu Rāja to hold it forever. He agreed, and thus his head-holding statue continues to protect Draupadī at the main entrance to her temple [and keeps the kingdom from suffering the demon’s revival].

These accounts are important for several unique details. The demon’s animal transformations in Adikeshava Bharatiyar’s rendering probably derive from the mythology of Mahiśāsura. For in *Devī Māhātmyam* 3.29–33, the Buffalo Demon also assumes various animal (lion, elephant) and human forms before he is finally dispatched by the goddess (Jagadisvarananda 1972, 48–49).¹⁴ It thus

14. Meyer (1984, 248–49) records a stunning ritual presentation of this scene at the Cūlai (Choolai in Madras City) Ankālamman Temple celebration of Navarātra: a vehicle bearing a figure of Mahiśa keeps charging at one bearing Ankālamman, and each time a different head is removed (which the goddess has “cut”): Asura, elephant, lion, tiger, buffalo, cow, boar, and ram. At last Mahiśa arrives with no head, only mango leaves sprouting from his neck.

presents an intriguing split theme: the Buffalo King first defeats a lion reminiscent of the lion that helped Durgā defeat the Buffalo Demon, Pōttu Rāja's anterior unregenerate self. He then becomes Draupadī's servant devotee, holding the human head of a new demon who inherits the more specifically demonic and victim aspects of Pōttu Rāja's "former" identity. The detail about Cunītaṇ finding Draupadī in the suicide fire is also instructive for its obvious evocation not only of Draupadī's birth from fire, but of the rite of firewalking. But the most original feature of these accounts is that they say nothing about Gingee and locate all their action in North India.

I have already remarked upon Adikeshava Bharatiyar's characteristic location of the mythology of Draupadī's second advent in the north. We now see that he has also split this mythology. Not only is there a "northern Gingee" that claims itself as Draupadī's "spiritual homeland" through the possessed voice of a little girl (see n. 1).¹⁵ There is also the precious detail that the royal residence of King Cunītaṇ is the ancient city of Kauśambī. In this, his account reveals a totally unexpected antiquarian precision, for Cunītaṇ does indeed have a purāṇic origin that fits all the details of these accounts. Under the Sanskrit name Sunītha, he appears in Lunar dynasty genealogies as a descendant of the Pāṇḍavas, eight generations from Janamejaya in *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 2.21 (Wilson [1840] 1972, 368–69), and nine generations from him in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 9.22.41 (Tagare 1976, 1241). Moreover, according to these sources, Sunītha rules from the capital of Kauśambī, the city near present-day Allahabad to which the Kaurava line is said to have relocated itself after Hāstinapura was washed away by the Ganges, several generations before Sunītha's reign.

I do not know what it was that motivated the selection of this obscure purāṇic figure as the link between the descent of the Pāṇḍavas and the second birth of Draupadī. I know of no other mythology about him, and in the purāṇic lists he is no more than a name. The move from Hāstinapura to Kauśambī takes place four generations before him in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, and five in the *Bhāgavata*. It is thus unlikely that this initial move south from Hāstinapura precipitated the further southern mythology of Cunītaṇ. It is striking, however, that one and the same pāratīyār—a man from the Cāṇār or Nāṭār community, reputed "toddy tappers"—should place on relatively equal footing a detail of impeccable purāṇic and

15. This pāratīyār recognizes Pañcaladeśa as Draupadī's ordinary homeland (see n. 1 above). It is thus apparently different from her "northern Gingee."

“northern” authority and the possessed voice of a little girl from a South Arcot village.

It is a different combination of the antiquarian and the cultic that characterizes the “Glorification of Draupadī,” or “History of Gingee,” of Brameesa Mudaliyar (see plate 5).

King Cunītaṇ, a grandson [*pērāṇ*] of the son of Janamejaya, was ruling at Hāstinapura. The demon Rōcakaṇ, a grandson of Baka, wanted vengeance for Baka’s death at the hands of Bhīma. He sent a letter to Cunītaṇ saying he would only be satisfied and be able to end his shame if he killed him, and fixed the date for war. Rōcakaṇ had a hundred heads and was extremely powerful. His boon, from Brahmā, was that though ninety-nine heads might be removed, the central head could not be cut off, for if anyone did so and it touched the ground, then the person who cut it would be destroyed.

Cunītaṇ got scared. He consulted his elders and ministers, and they advised him that only Draupadī could kill Rōcakaṇ: “She is the Parāśakti, and has all powers. But to have Draupadī take a second birth you must do a sacrifice, and the sacrifice must be performed by the same two rishis whose sacrifice for Draupadī’s father resulted in her previous birth. These two, Upayaṇ, or Upayācaṇ, and Yācaṇ, are ever-living beings, *jīvanmuktas*, and are alive even now though no one can see them.”

So Cunītaṇ searched all over India for the two rishis, and finally came to Gingee, to the Caṅkarāparaṇi, the “living river.” Cunītaṇ prayed and did *tapas*, and was finally able to see them. To fulfill his wish they undertook the sacrifice on the banks of the river. In that fire Parāśakti was born anew. In her first birth, in the Dvāpara yuga, she was born alone.¹⁶ Now, in the Kali yuga, she was born with five instruments: *virapampai* [“heroic *pampai* drum”], *virakantakam* [“heroic turmeric powder”], *virakuntam* [“heroic lance”], *viracāṭṭi* [“heroic whip”], and *viramaṇi* [“heroic bell”]. Born from that fire with all these instruments, she asked Cunītaṇ what she should do.

Cunītaṇ told her of Rōcakaṇ’s challenge, and Draupadī promised to help him: “We must protect our lineage [*paramparam*]. But since Rōcakaṇ has this boon from Brahmā, who will keep his head from touching the ground?” Cunītaṇ

16. Note the neglect of Dhṛṣṭadyumna, Draupadī’s brother, with whom this *pāratiyār* is well familiar; see further chap. 9, sec. C, and chaps. 17–19.

wondered the same: "Who will come with courage to hold this head?" Draupadī then replied, "There is one man, Pōttu Rāja, a devotee of Śiva, ever praising Śiva and performing Śivapūjā. He rules the country of Kalingadeśa. This Kalingarāja cares nothing for worldliness. He is just always doing Śivabhakti [*bhakti*, or devotion, to Śiva]. Only he can hold the head and prevent it from falling. You should go there and divert him from his prayers and get his attention."

So Cunītaṇ went to Kalingadeśa and found Pōttu Rāja. By chance, he caught Pōttu Rāja at a moment when he had just opened his eyes during his prayers, and Pōttu Rāja thus saw him. Pōttu Rāja asked Cunītaṇ why he had come. Cunītaṇ identified himself as a descendant of the great Śivabhakta Arjuna. As soon as he heard this, Pōttu Rāja acceded to his request. Told that Draupadī had taken birth at Gingee, he came there to see her. But even so he bore the Śivaliṅgam that he always used in his prayers on his head. Since then he has always carried it in that fashion.

Pōttu Rāja approached Draupadī and asked, "What is my duty, Ammaṇ?" Draupadī told him that because he was a Śivabhakta, he was the right person to hold Rōcakaṇ's hundredth head. Pōttu Rāja concurred, and they set off with Cunītaṇ to confront Rōcakaṇ. When they arrived Rōcakaṇ taunted them with his invulnerability. He laughed as Draupadī cut off the first ninety-nine heads. Finally, with the one remaining head, he mocked her: "If you cut off my last head you will certainly die." Without saying anything she boldly severed it, and Pōttu Rāja caught it in his arms without allowing it to touch the ground. Thus Rōcakaṇ was destroyed. After this Pōttu Rāja took a vow that he would always hold the head in his hand: "Now, Draupadī Ammaṇ, have no fear. Have no doubt about me. I will never let it down. I will always stand holding this head in front of your residence."

Draupadī then disappeared from that place, and where she vanished a temple was built: the Gingee temple, from which people come to bring home earth when they found a Draupadī temple elsewhere. But in front of every Draupadī temple there is a statue of Pōttu Rāja holding the head of Rōcakaṇ. And Draupadī, by way of thanks to Pōttu Rāja, said that all respect [*mariyātai*] and all pūjās should first be done to Pōttu Rāja. Thus he is to be respected first. Without Pōttu Rāja there is no festival.

Compared with our initial version, this account contains a wealth of cultic and iconographic details: the links with the Mēlaccēri temple, the lingam on Pōttu Rāja's head, the five cultic instruments, and the highly noteworthy prescriptions for ritual protocol reflected in the closing statements. All of these matters shall reclaim our attention, especially in chapters 16 and 17 where I will discuss further the mythology of the five instruments. We should also note that, despite its author's distaste for popular distortions, Brameesa Mudaliyar's story is closer than our other pāratīyār accounts to the Pōrmaṇṇan story of the Terukkūttu.

As to the antiquarian transformations, Cunītaṇ's search for Yācaṇ and Upayācaṇ now becomes the bridge between the North Indian milieu of the Pāṇḍavas and their descendants and the convergence upon Gingee of the essentials of the Draupadī cult. The purāṇic detail about Kauśambī is lost, and so is the turn toward the Himalayas. Instead of doing his tapas with his Brahman minister Pōttu Rāja in the Himalayas, Cunītaṇ does his tapas in Gingee, and he must go to Kalingadeśa to find Pōttu Rāja the "king." But with this new geography, we have a precision of another order. According to this pāratīyār, Kalingadeśa is "near Calcutta, in the area of Vijayawada and Vishakhapatnam." Calcutta aside, the other two cities named indicate an area of northern coastal Andhra Pradesh, and provide intriguing testimony that the Draupadī cult retains its own folk memories that Pōta Rāju (again, his name in Telugu) has his most concentrated and diversified cult in that area.¹⁷

Of the five other pāratīyār versions, let us note only their resolutions of the "two life" and "north/south" problems. B. Kothandarama Goundar, the only one to refer to Pōttu Rāja as Pōrmaṇṇan, harks back to the northern setting as the site of two occasions for Draupadī to be served by him, both in her initial lifetime in the Dvāpara yuga. First Pōrmaṇṇan helps her win the *Mahābhārata* war, and then he assists, in the usual fashion, in slaying Acalamman. Draupadī's second birth then involves her in defeating another demon (*arakkāṇ*)—not Acalamman, but the pāratīyār could not remember his name—who built Gingee Fort, and who menaced the region through his untold vices, including cannibalism, until certain sages (*muṇivarkaḷ*) raised Draupadī from a sacrificial fire in the

17. See especially Biardeau, in press; 1981a, 230–37; Herrenschmidt 1981, 157–58; Elmore 1915, 18–23, 85–86; Whitehead 1921, 40.

Mēlaccēri forest.¹⁸ It is noteworthy that in this account, while the demon rules, Gingee is without a king. Instead of Cuniṭaṇ, the sacrifice must thus be performed by the sages.

Finally, closest to the more “popular” versions of the story, the other four pāratīyārs interviewed have Cuniṭaṇ perform his sacrifice, not as a king of Kauśambī or a pilgrim from Hāstinapura, but as a king of Gingee, southern Gingee. We shall look more closely at what is for our purposes the most important of these versions in the next section of this chapter: that of the Mēlaccēri temple pūcāri and itinerant pāratīyār Adikeshava Pillai. Except for Adikeshava Pillai’s concern to relate his story specifically to the Mēlaccēri temple’s construction legend, the accounts by the other three pāratīyārs—T. Aranganathan, N. Kannapiran, and M. C. Venkatesha Bharatīyar—tell essentially the same tale.

With these transitions and transformations in mind, we can now appreciate the more “popular” version of this story that was worked up by the Pakkiri-pālaiyam Terukkūttu troupe as an improvised drama, staged at my request (or better, to satisfy my curiosity), and called *Acalammācuraṇ Caṇṭai Nāṭakam*, “The Demon Acalamman’s Fight.”¹⁹

Cuniṭaṇ [now Cuniṭavarman or Cuniṭamahārājaṇ] rules at Gingee with his wife, Māṇikkavaḷḷi [“Ruby Creeper” or “Ruby Bracelet”]. Childless, they are doing tapas to obtain offspring. They pray to Draupadī, their “lineage deity,” invoking her as “the Kuladeva who is living at Gingee” [*ceṇci-patīyil vāḷkinra kulateyvaṁ*].

Acalammācuraṇ and his wife, Ceṇpakavaḷḷi, then appear, singing and dancing with arrogant and seductive gestures. Acalamman declares his intention to perform tapas for the boon of not dying [*alīyātavaram*]. He does so, and Brahmā appears before him. The demon asks that he should be invulnerable to any weapon or person who is not born from fire. Brahmā grants the boon. Acalamman then fights with Cuniṭaṇ, defeats him, and jails him.

18. I heard nowhere else about this demon of the Gingee Fort, but the story must have some currency in the Gingee area, as its author is from a village only four miles east of Gingee. The fort-building demon reminds one of the building of Asgard in Norse mythology.

19. The play was staged in April 1982 at Cinnapāpucamuttiram village before a typical Terukkūttu audience, but not as part of that village’s Draupadi festival. After staging earlier dramas for my benefit (see chap. 7, sec. C) at their own village, the dramatists preferred a fresher and less contentious venue, and arranged for the site themselves.

Vyāsa [Vedavyāsa] then appears and discusses the demon's atrocities with Cunītaṇ's minister [the Kaṭṭiyaṅkāraṇ]. He invokes the five Pāṇḍavas, who are in heaven [*svarga*]. The five arrive in muṭti, and Vyāsa instructs them to do a sacrifice so that Pāñcālī can be reborn. The Pāṇḍavas do the yākam in the Mēlaccēri forest, near Mēlaccēri village, and Draupadī is born as Vīrapāñcālī. She is dressed in a bright pink and green saree, wears a crown, and swings her cūlam, the Vīrakuntam, her "heroic lance" [for which a wooden sword was substituted].

Vyāsa now tells Vīrapāñcālī that Acalammācuraṇ has jailed a thousand kings and plans to offer them to her as human sacrifices to get her blessing. But Vyāsa doubts that she will accept these offerings. Rather, he advises her to kill the demon to spread her family fame, and asks whether she will accept the demon's offerings or kill him. Draupadī replies that she will kill the demon, but asks her guru Vyāsa how it can be done. Vyāsa explains that Acalamman has a thousand heads. "You can cut off nine hundred and ninety-nine, but when you remove the last one, Pōrmaṇṇaṇ should hold it to keep it from touching the ground. If it touches the ground, the head of the person who cut it will burst into a thousand pieces."

So they fight. Soon the demon is subdued and lies down on the musician's platform, his legs dangling below it. Draupadī stands above and behind him, dominating the scene, swinging her cūlam with her right hand and waving rolled up sheets [heads] with her left (see plate 6). As she does this, she sings of making the heads into a garland for herself to wear [with the last head to be for Pōrmaṇṇaṇ].²⁰

Now Acalamman's wife, Ceṇpakavaḷḷi, approaches Draupadī and begs to be rejoined with him: "You have killed my husband. I want to be with him, so let me be with you. Grant me good fortune for my marriage badge [*tālippākkiyam*]." Vyāsa advises Draupadī to give refuge to Ceṇpakavaḷḷi, so she transforms her into the parrot that she holds on her hand. Ceṇpakavaḷḷi will thus be with her husband's heads, worn by Draupadī in her universal form [Viśvarūpaṁ] as Vīrapāñcālī. Vyāsa then advises Cunītaṇ that

20. This last detail was left out, as Pōrmaṇṇaṇ's part was overshadowed by Mayakrishnan's arresting performance of Draupadī. The actors said afterward it was an oversight.

he should worship Draupadī in the Mēlaccēri forest, where she will always live in her fierce form [*akōra-uruvam*].

There are at least ten new features in this version of the story. (1) The two wives are introduced, a typical Terukkūttu embellishment. (2) Cūṇitaṇ's tapas, now done with his wife, has the goal of obtaining children, not of bringing forth Draupadī. As there is no further mention of his childlessness in the play, it seems to be an indication of the precariousness of his kingdom. (3) Cūṇitaṇ worships Draupadī as a lineage deity, but he is not a descendant of the Pāṇḍavas. (4) By the same token, since Bhīma's is not one of Cūṇitaṇ's ancestors, Acalammaṇ has no cause to avenge himself against Cūṇitaṇ for Bhīma's slaying of Baka. If the demon is still a descendant of Baka, the play does not mention it. (5) The demon's invulnerability against anyone not born from fire finally explains why Draupadī in particular must kill him. (6) The jailing of Cūṇitaṇ is another indication of his weakness, and another typical Terukkūttu device, in this case to remove a character temporarily from the action, or to present a pretext for his rescue or escape.²¹ (7) The parts of Vyāsa and the Pāṇḍavas in performing the sacrifice replace the roles of other priests and sacrificers in previous versions. (8) The demon's would-be sacrifice of the thousand kings unveils the magnitude of Draupadī's fierce form: either way she will be the recipient of a thousand heads, whether those of the kings or those of the demon. (9) Draupadī's garland of heads further enhances her fierceness, evoking an image we must not forget. (10) The transformation of Ceṇṇakavaḷḷi into Draupadī's parrot (see plate 7) provides a typical demon(ess)-to-devotee folk explanation—a silly distortion, according to Brameesa Mudaliyar—of a persistent feature of Draupadī's iconography.

The suggestion that Draupadī transforms the demon's wife into her devotee provides the first hint that she may also do the same with the demon himself, and thus presents an occasion to note the variations in the latter's name. Usually he is called either Acalammaṇ (the most common name) or some seeming modification (Almacan by V. Venugopala Aiyar; Acilomaṇ by N. Kannapiran, and Acampālācūraṇ by M. C. Venkatesha Bhagavatar). The only exception is Brameesa Mudaliyar's Rōcakaṇ. None of my informants could supply any of these variants, including Rōcakaṇ, with a Tamil etymology. But two of the Acalammaṇ alternatives pose possible

21. But it also recalls the version of the pāratīyār Kothandarama Goundar in which, in the absence of a king, the sages must perform the sacrifice that brings forth Draupadī to kill the demon who built the Gingee Fort.

Sanskrit derivations. Acilomaṇ recalls Asiloman, "He whose hairs are sharp as swords," one of the demon companions of Mahiṣāsura in the *Devī Māhātmyam* (2.42; Jagadisvarananda 1972, 34). But as the text gives this demon no more than a name, it is hard to explain why he would be linked directly with Draupadī's opponent. Perhaps, at best, his name provides a convenient, irregular Sanskritization of the Tamil name. More intriguing, however, is the name Acampāla. Quite possibly the initial element *aca-* in most of these names derives from *acam* (Sanskrit *aja*), "goat." Acampāla in particular would thus mean "Protector of Goats."²² If by killing this demon Draupadī transforms him into her devotee, it might be fitting for him to be called a "Protector of Goats." Indeed, as we shall see, Pōttu Rāja has a special affinity with the goat sacrifice, and goat heads above all are offered, sometimes by the hundreds and thousands, to village goddesses (see, e.g., Whitehead 1921, 99). But let us reserve for chapters 16 and 17 our discussion of what it might mean for the Buffalo King to hold forever in his hand the ultimate head of a Protector of Goats.

With the improvised drama as a point of entry, one could trace out further folk transformations of this cycle. For instance, the icon sculptor N. Dandapani told a similar tale, which included the parrot, the boon against all but those born from fire, and the thousand-headed garland, but with two noteworthy variations. The garland of nine hundred and ninety-nine heads is worn by Pōrmaṇṇaṇ, not Draupadī; and the king who needs Draupadī to kill the demon is not Cuniṭaṇ but Pulantiraṇ, son of Arjuna and the Madurai princess Alli—a further elaboration of Tamil *Mahābhārata* folklore (see chap. 10 and app. 1).²³ As a descendant of the Pāṇḍavas, Pulantiraṇ is thus once again a hereditary foe of the demon-descendant of Baka.

Indeed, once the story is connected with Pulantiraṇ, it changes its venue from Gingee to Madurai and reopens the question of the diffusion and priority of the Gingee versions. Let me only repeat, however, that while there is no way to view one Gingee version as original or prototypical, and while there is every reason to suspect that Gingee versions have long coexisted with "antiquarian" versions that give the area no special position, there are more

22. On other symbolic allusions to goat sacrifices, see chap. 13, sec. C.

23. The Pōrmaṇṇaṇ that Dandapani sculpted for me shows this feature, with nine heads representing the larger total. If Acalammaṇ is ultimately the "Protector of Goats," Pōrmaṇṇaṇ here not only holds his ultimate head, but garlands himself with all the rest. I have not, however, seen a similar Pōrmaṇṇaṇ elsewhere. Processional Pōttu Rāja-Pōrmaṇṇaṇ icons are more commonly garlanded with a whip.

reasons to suspect that the Gingee traditions were replaced over recent centuries than that they took the place of others. Moreover, if one is permitted an evaluation of informants, there were none more deeply steeped in Draupadī cult traditions than those who brought King Cūṇṭaṇ—each in different ways—to Gingee: V. M. Brameesa Mudaliyar, Adikeshava Pillai, and the drama teachers R. S. Natarajan and R. S. Mayakrishnan.

In any case, it is sufficient to stop here without going into still more “popular,” nonspecialist retellings of this story. Instead, let us look more closely at the story of Cūṇṭaṇ as it has been enriched at the Mēlaccēri temple, Draupadī’s temple of origins.

C. The Stone Ammaṇ with Hair

We return, first, to Nārāyaṇaṇ Pillai’s Mackenzie manuscript account of the founding of the “original” Draupadī temple “on the northern boundary” of Gingee. It will be recalled that he traces the inspiration for the construction of the temple to a revelation by Draupadī-ammaṇ herself to Tubākki Krishnappa, the effective founder of the line of Gingee Nāyak kings. His reference to this revelation, however, is only an allusion, obviously knowledgeable but uninformative: “Revealing herself, Draupadī-ammaṇ showed the hair in the flower that had been fastened to her.”²⁴ Commissioned to write history, Nārāyaṇaṇ Pillai seems to content himself with this bare and, by itself, baffling narrative fragment, and to move on from it to what he takes to be the revelation’s historical repercussions. Thus, he tells us, the Nāyak responded by constructing the Draupadī-Dharmarāja temple and a nearby tank (most certainly the Pañcapāṇḍava tank, built just south of the temple in pentagonal shape to commemorate, according to today’s informants, the five Pāṇḍavas). And more than this the Nāyak made arrangements that emoluments would be granted to Draupadī from Tirupati to the Coleroon, and that respect would be given to the Draupadī temple’s “trustee” (*tarmakarttā*), a man whose descendant Appācāmi Pillai was an “important pūcārī” in Nārāyaṇaṇ Pillai’s own time.

24. *Turōpataiyammaṇ pirattil[ya]kṣamāy aval muṭitta pūvil mayirum kātṭ[al]āṇāl* (Dikshitar 1952, 25). As indicated, the Tamil of the text, which according to Krishnaswami Aiyangar (1930, 9) “is written in a brogue, a sort of hybrid between bazaar Tamil and the official Hindustani written Tamil,” must often be amended. In this case, the meanings are clear: *pirattiyakṣamāy* is used further down the same page to describe the same revelation; and *kāṭṭāṇāl* must be *kāṭṭal* + *āṇāl*, “she was showing, she showed.” My thanks to Pon Kothandaraman and Indira Peterson for clarifying this passage, each in the same way.

It may well be that Nārāyaṇaṇ Piḷḷai had access to historical traditions linking the construction of the Mēlaccēri temple, or more likely some parts of it, to Tubākki Krishnappa, or at least to his Nāyak successors. M. N. Deshpande, retired director general of the Archaeological Survey of India, who examined slides of the temple for me, felt that its oldest features were likely to be from the late sixteenth century (the droplike arm brackets above the *kalāśa* portions of some of the temple pillars, various lotus and bird motifs on the pillars), while others were probably from the seventeenth (the finely polished *adhiṣṭhāna* base for the four temple icons and the icons themselves [see plate 1], the alternately square and octagonal pillar in the Pōttu Rāja maṇḍapa near the Pōttu Rāja and Muttāl Rāvuttan icons, and various sixteen-sided pillars and *kīcaka* caryatid motifs in the same structure). Such features are clearly earlier and finer than what one finds in most other Draupadī temples in the core area.

But as history, Nārāyaṇaṇ Piḷḷai's account fills us with misgivings. The amount of space given to the Draupadī temple and its administration is disproportionate with what is said of other more prestigious building projects—including other temples in the immediate area—that the Nāyak undertook. Moreover, are we to think that in the time of Tubākki Krishnappa, respect was paid in all the temples of his kingdom—including such great Brahmanical temples as those at Chidambaram, Kanchipuram, Tiruvannamalai,²⁵ and even Tirupati—to the Mēlaccēri temple's Kōṇār trustee? Perhaps, as Shulman has suggested to me, the passage only means that the Mēlaccēri temple Dharmakartā distributed honors in the various temples. But in either case, a ceremonial link between the Gingee Draupadī temple and the region's great Brahmanical temples is surprising. Possibly Tubākki Krishnappa's unnamed trustee was an important minister and favorite of the Nāyak. There is at least one tradition that places a descendant of Āṇanta Kōṇ in exactly such a position.²⁶ Perhaps Nārāyaṇaṇ Piḷḷai's account recalls a time

25. The grand gate tower at Tiruvannamalai dates from the time of Tubākki Krishnappa; it was begun by Krishnadeva Rāya in 1516 and completed by the Nāyak of Thanjavur (Jagadisa Ayyar 1982a, 191).

26. Edwardes (1926, 1) summarizes an alleged Mackenzie manuscript in which Āṇanta Kōṇ, searching for his stray flocks, meets a Mahāpuruṣa. The latter tells him that "by his exertions" Gingee will become great, and commands him to go directly to a Nāyak named Vijayaranga who is made a contemporary of "Krishna Rāyul of Anebondi," probably Krishnadeva Rāya of Vijayanagar (a contemporary of Tubākki Krishnappa). In accordance with the Mahāpuruṣa's prophesy, the kingdom of Gingee was then established "with the help of Anandakona, whose son, Triṣṭapitla, became [its] prime minister." Cf chap. 3, n. 6, and chaps. 7 and 9: the tradition of Yādavas (i.e., Kōṇārs) serving kings is an epic theme involving Kṛṣṇa.

when two offices traditional to the Kōṇārs of Gingee—the one advisory service of the Rājas, the other religious service of Draupadī—were overseen by one person.

It is evident, in any case, that the account as a whole is built on local Kōṇār traditions, ones to which Nārāyaṇaṇ Piḷlai must have had access as a Gingee Kōṇār himself. He is obviously familiar with the “important pūcāri” Appācāmi Piḷlai, who would likely have been the main repository for the traditions of the temple in Nārāyaṇaṇ Piḷlai’s time, just as the current pūcāri Adikeshava Pillai is the acknowledged authority today. Thus, along with the historical possibilities in Nārāyaṇaṇ Piḷlai’s account, we must also see in it an attempt to give historical weight to important mythical traditions of the Kōṇār community.

Fortunately, the story of Draupadī’s revelation at the Mēlaccēri temple—of how she “showed the hair in the flower that had been fastened to her”—has not been lost. It is still told at Mēlaccēri and in the surrounding area, though I found no version of it outside of Gingee Taluk. I have not, however, made any systematic inquiry into its range of circulation, which was probably once wider than it is today. The important point is that it is one of the main myths of the oral *sthālapurāṇa* of Draupadī’s temple of origins. And unlike other myths that associate Draupadī with Gingee and Mēlaccēri, it is unique in being focused specifically on the temple, and on the Draupadī icon within it.

Counting Nārāyaṇaṇ Piḷlai’s teasing allusion, I have found the myth in four different versions. For the most part they differ, not in the basic narrative, but in the name of the story’s king. I will return to this point shortly. But first let us examine the myth itself. I take as primary version the account of Adikeshava Pillai, the current Mēlaccēri temple pūcāri and a professional pāratyār (he recites the *Mahābhārata* not only at other Draupadī festivals, but at Kūttāṇṭavar festivals), and also the spiritual and most likely lineal heir of the “important pūcāri” who served the temple in the time of Nārāyaṇaṇ Piḷlai as well as of the temple’s prestigious trustee in the time of Tubākki Krishnappa.²⁷ Adikeshava Piḷlai’s account is our richest in narrative detail. It is especially important for its attention to the relation between the story itself and the construction of the temple complex. Map 4, showing the main features of the

27. Adikeshava Pillai recalls his paternal lineage back through five generations, but the names of Nārāyaṇaṇ Piḷlai and Appācāmi Piḷlai were unknown to him.

Mēlaccēri temple, may thus serve as an integral background to the tale.

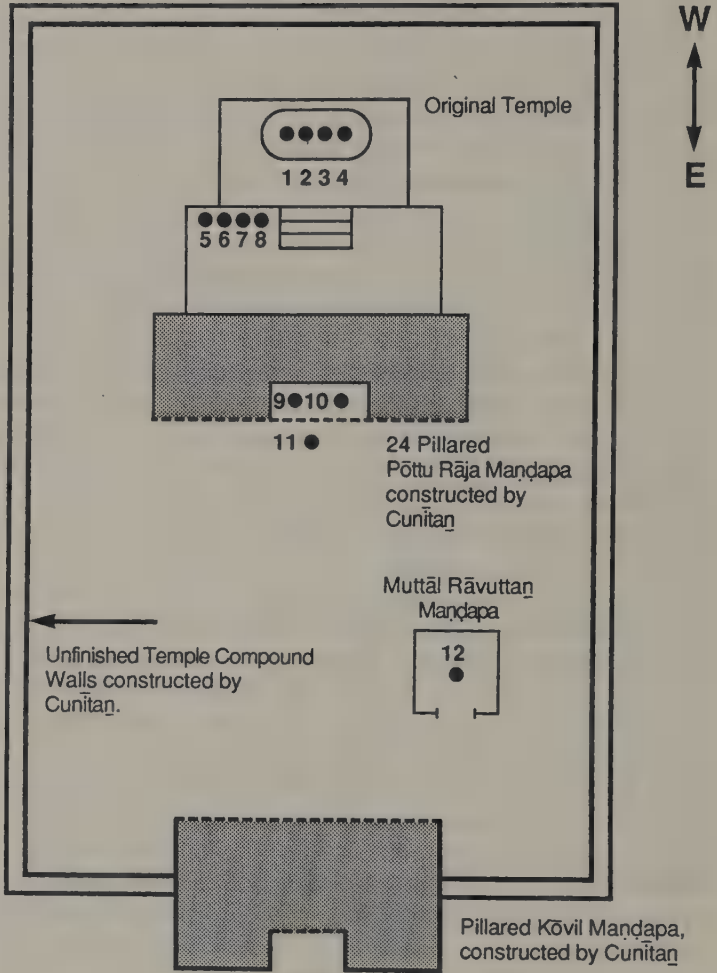
According to Adikeshava Pillai, the original Draupadī temple goes back to the time of King Cunītaṇ, though he gave two somewhat different versions of its history. Interviewed at the temple site, he indicated that the temple's garbhagrha was built (I assume this must mean rebuilt) by Rāja Kōṇār (i.e., Ānanta Kōṇ) and Kṛṣṇa Kōṇār, the first two rulers (parallel cousins, let us note) of the Kōṇ dynasty, with the remaining features going further back (many generations, beyond count) to the reign of Cunītaṇ. But in a more straightforward narrative account, recorded at night in Mēlaccēri village, away from the promptings of the temple, he attributed the entire founding and construction to Cunītaṇ. I will follow this latter account in the main, but I note the more differentiated information on map 4 by indicating all the features attributed to Cunītaṇ except the "original temple." It is important to note that while Adikeshava Pillai makes Cunītaṇ a precursor of the founding Kōṇs, he leaves their filiation rather vague. This would seem to be because if Cunītaṇ is a Kōṇār, he is one of a different order. Let us recall that Kōṇār is a regional name for Yādava, the caste of Kṛṣṇa. According to Adikeshava Pillai's version of the Cunītaṇ myth, Cunītaṇ is a seventh-generation descendant of the Pāṇḍavas and a scion of the Lunar dynasty. In terms of Cunītaṇ's immediate paternal descent, which would be the normal means of reckoning, it is not clear how he is a Kōṇār or Yādava. But he does have Yādava-Kōṇār blood in his veins on the maternal side, for the Pāṇḍavas themselves are sons of Kṛṣṇa's aunt Kuntī. And the Pāṇḍavas' own line to Cunītaṇ passes through Arjuna's marriage to Kṛṣṇa's sister Subhadrā. In this regard, it is highly significant that the Draupadī image in the Mēlaccēri temple garbhagrha—the icon that chastises Cunītaṇ in the myth to which we will now turn—is immediately flanked by images of these two Kōṇār-Yādava ladies (see plate 1). They are the female Yādava complements to Cunītaṇ's Yādava-Kōṇār connections with the Lunar dynasty.²⁸

So far, then, by Adikeshava Pillai's account, when Cunītaṇ ruled at Old Gingee or Mēlaccēri, Draupadī took birth a second time to

28. It thus appears that Cunītaṇ stories involve a reworking of themes relating the Yādavas with the Paurava-Kaurava-Bhārata line of the Lunar dynasty, a problematic that goes back not only through the main action of the *Mahābhārata*, but to the myth of Yayāti (see Defourny 1978). The Yayāti myth forms part of the stock in trade of the pāratyārs, and it is commonly included in their Draupadī festival repertoires (see chap. 7, sec. A).



Bouldered hill in back of Temple



- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Kuntī (seated) | 7. Serpent |
| 2. Draupadī | 8. Ādiśeṣa |
| 3. Subhadrā | 9. Muttāl Rāvuttan
(vegetarian) |
| 4. Viṣṇu-Durkai | 10. Pōttu Rāja |
| 5. Viṇāyakar | 11. Flagstaff |
| 6. Craftsman (Cilpi)
who built the temple | 12. Muttāl Rāvuttan
(non-vegetarian) |

Map 4. The Mēlaccēri Draupadī Temple

rescue him from the demon Acalamman, who had overthrown him and threatened to kill him. After she killed the demon, she cautioned Cunītan before departing:

Hereafter I am disappearing [*maṛaital*]. Don't call on me very often. You prayed, offering in the fire, and I came. Hereafter you rule the country in happiness. Now I am going. You must be a bhakta to me [*nī pakṭiyāka irukka vēṇṭum*]. If you are, you will get rain three times a month. You must construct a temple for me and worship me by doing *naivedyam*. If you act in this fashion I will protect you. Your dynasty [or lineage: *paramparai*] will not have more than one son [*pillai*] to this village [*ūr*].

Thus Cunītan builds the temple where he did his fire sacrifice and places the icon there. As an only son himself, he begins a line that is to be passed on through one son per generation: *pillai* being not only a term for "son," but a caste title for Kōṇārs that we have run across several times already. Thus Adikeshava Pillai could further claim that he alone of all his contemporaries was of King Cunītan's pure lineage.

With these incidents as background, Adikeshava Pillai turns to the main myth specific to the temple.

At this time, when Cunītan was ruling Old Gingee, there were ten acres of land near the temple for a flower garden to supply the *arcaka* [or *pūcāri*] with flowers for the temple pūjās. It was the custom [*valakkam*] that each day, after the flowers were placed on the Amman, the pūcāri would bring them along with a coconut and some turmeric powder [*vīrakantakam*] before the king, as *prasādam*. This pūcāri, however, had a beautiful concubine [a "keeper": the Anglo-Indian word was used]. One day, without the pūcāri knowing it, the girl, seeing the beautiful flowers on the icon, took them off and placed them in her kūntal [her hair, tied up in the back into a knot], just to enjoy them. After some time, she again removed them from her kūntal and put them back on the Amman. The pūcāri, unaware what his keeper had done, then came and removed the flowers from the Amman and sent them with the other articles to the king's palace.

When these articles of *prasādam* reached the palace, there was one hair lying in the flowers. The queen took the offerings and noticed it, and in grave doubt, asked the king: "How is it that there is a hair in the flowers? It is a stone icon

[*kalcilai*]. Does a god[dess] have hair [*cāmikkuk kūntal untō*]?²⁹ Immediately, the king called back the pūcāri and demanded an answer as to how the hair came to be in the flowers, repeating the queen's questions. The pūcāri had never seen the hair, and knew nothing of what had caused it to be there. He was blinking, and could not answer. So in rising anger, the king said: "It is wrong that you brought these flowers into the king's *sabhā* [court]. It is a disgrace. I will give you a week's time. If you can answer my question in one week, then well and good. Otherwise you will be punished with death."³⁰

When the pūcāri returned to the temple, he unburdened his troubles to the Ammaṇ. He wept and wept, and prayed day and night, never going back to his own house. In deep devotion, begging from his heart, doing daily observances, he implored her to protect his life: "Somehow you must show your hair to the king." At last the Ammaṇ appeared in his dream, and said: "I will not appear on any of these days. But on Friday let the king and queen come before my image. If you do the regular apicēkas and pūjās on that day, and place a white screen [*veṇṭirai*] before me, then I will show my kūntal."

Accordingly on the next Friday, the pūcāri did a pūjā, with pampai drums, flowers, and all the other offerings, in the presence of the king and queen. Only the pūcāri could see the icon, as the screen was in front of it. Again the king asked: "Can a stone icon have hair?" As soon as he stepped forward to peer over the screen, the Ammaṇ flashed the dishevelled hair of her kūntal out over the screen and into the king's eyes.

Yet at this point only the pūcāri could see the Ammaṇ's real form. The king still had a doubt: the pūcāri could have pulled a trick. "It may be hair, but is it the Ammaṇ's? He is going to lose his life, so he has resorted to some trick." Thus

29. Literally, "Does a god(dess) have a kūntal?" In R. Munnacami Naidu's written version (see below), the king discovers the hair himself (the queen is not mentioned) and asks: "Is there head-hair on an Ammaṇ?" (*ammaṇukku talaiyil-muṭi irukkiratā*). Gopala Goundar simply asks, "How has this hair come?" (*eppati vantata inta mayirā*).

30. Other versions differ here. According to Munnacami Naidu, the pūcāri is so frightened by the king's anger that he answers yes, and then has to prove it. There is no precise threat of execution; the pūcāri vows that he will show the king within forty-eight days. Gopala Goundar has the queen confront the pūcāri, and it is she who tells him he will be beheaded unless he makes amends.

reflecting, and thinking that the hair was artificial, the king touched the Amman's hair and pulled one piece of it. When he did this, he heard the sound made when a hair is pulled. The root of the hair came over the screen and into the Rāja's hand, and he saw that it was tipped with blood. Immediately he became blind.³¹

At once the king fell at the feet of the pūcāri and implored him: "Without knowing the truth I have caused you all these hardships. Without knowing your Amman's power I have tested you. You are a firmer devotee of Amman than I. Because I doubted you, all this has happened to me. Pray on my behalf to Amman to restore my sight." The pūcāri prayed faithfully every day, and one night the Amman appeared in his dream and said the king would get back only three-fourths of his vision, not all of it, as he had tested her. So the next day, after the pūjā, he got back three-fourths of his vision. In gratitude, he then decided to construct the twenty-four pillared Pōttu Rāja maṇḍapam, with the figures of Pōttu Rāja and Muttāl Rāvuttan, and the Kōvil maṇḍapam by which one enters the temple. And he began to construct the temple compound wall, but died before it was finished, which is the reason it is unfinished today [see plate 2].

As already remarked, this story has not been found outside of Gingee Taluk. Indeed, of the other three versions, only one comes from outside of Gingee town and Mēlaccēri village,³² and that was mailed to me from Mēlcēvūr village (only about thirteen miles from Mēlaccēri) by R. Munnacami Naidu, who generously wrote it down in response to my questionnaire, having heard it in his village from a pāratīyār who claimed to be a descendant of the pūcāri in the story. One thinks immediately that he may have heard it from Adikeshava Pillai himself. To be sure, the two versions differ at a number of points, and in the version just recounted, Adikeshava Pillai claims descent from the king rather than the pūcāri. But as he is also the current Mēlaccēri temple pūcāri, it is easy to see how

31. Munnacami Naidu's account leaves out the blinding: having seen the hair, the king was happy. Perhaps this is because he attributes the story to a king for whom blindness would be inappropriate (see below). But all accounts are close on the description of the sudden release of the hair: according to Munnacami Naidu, "the dishevelled hair of the Amman was seen falling over the white screen"; according to Gopala Goundar, it is "when she whirled her hair about" (*kūntalai viciri aṭicappōtu*) that the king became blind.

32. Gopala Goundar is the senior trustee of the Mēlaccēri temple. Nārāyaṇan Pillai evidently came from Gingee.

variations could arise on this point, and not hard to imagine how they could have arisen on others.

The story would thus seem to have a very limited regional circulation. It was not known to my most knowledgeable informants on Draupadī cult matters: the two brothers who lead the Pakkiri-pālaiyam Terukkūttu troupe (who twice performed at Mēlaccēri) or the learned pāratīyār Brameesa Mudaliyar from Kanchipuram. Indeed, the latter voiced grave doubts about the authenticity of the story by pointing out that it sounded like a reworking of a similar tale concerning a Śivalingam in a Śiva temple at the village of Tiruppulivaṇam (Tindivanam Taluk, South Arcot District), ten miles north of Tindivanam. According to this story,

there was once at that temple a *gurukkaḷ* [Śaivite Brahman priest] who was daily supposed to bring to the king the flowers that had been used for pūjā, along with prasādam. One day he didn't come, but went instead to visit a prostitute. The king was disconcerted, so he sent word to the *gurukkaḷ* that he would come in person to the temple to claim the flowers. So the *gurukkaḷ*, who had given them to the prostitute, had to reclaim them to give them to the king. The king accepted the flowers, but when he got back to his palace he found some hair in them. He then summoned the *gurukkaḷ* and asked: "Can a lingam have hair? It is a stone!" The *gurukkaḷ*, rather than expose his visit to the prostitute, said, "Yes it can" [cf. the variant in n. 29 above]. So the king told him he would come to the temple at ten the next morning to see if this was true. The *gurukkaḷ* prayed all night to Śiva to save him, and when the king came the next morning the lingam had a topknot [*kuṭumi*]. So the king believed the *gurukkaḷ*, and since that day the Tiruppulivaṇam lingam has always had a *kuṭumi* sculpted on it.

It is obvious that these two myths are variations on a single theme, one that has indeed been found elsewhere, in Andhra Pradesh and Orissa, and in myths, not about the goddess or Śiva, but about Viṣṇu.³³ But neither of our two South Arcot myths should

33. I thank David Shulman for the Andhra story, which he and Velcheru Narayana Rao recorded from local priests at Śrikākulam in Krishna District in February 1986, and about which they are preparing an article. For the Orissa story, notably from a cycle of Devadāsis' (courtesans') stories at the Jagannātha temple in Puri, see Marglin 1985, 92–93. In each, the flowers with the hair of the priest's concubine reach the court. In the Andhra account the queen spots it; in the Puri account the king. In both, the priest prays to Viṣṇu on the night before his execution, and

be taken as reflecting on the other's authenticity. Better, let us regard them for the light they shed on each other. The sexual overtones of the hair on the lingam are only thinly veiled and suggest by analogy that the hair on the Draupadī icon also has to do with themes of chastity and its violation. We will defer our main discussion of Draupadī's hair for our treatment of the Draupadī cult's *Mahābhārata*. What is most striking here is the way in which the Mēlaccēri temple myth evokes this symbol—one of the most powerful in the Draupadī cult—in connection with its own royal tradition. Just as it is the vow Draupadī makes concerning her hair that leads to the punishment of the kings who violate her in the *Mahābhārata*, so it is again with her hair that she punishes the king of Gingee for doubting her miraculous power and violating the sanctity of her Mēlaccēri icon. The unfurling of Draupadī's hair, whether for thirteen years or for a momentary flash, is a primary symbol of her terrible destructive power. There is nothing comparable in the myths that tell of hair growing from a Śivalingam or from an icon of Viṣṇu.

There are, of course, other features of the story that evoke aspects of Draupadī cult drama, myth, and ritual: the screen, the flowers in the hair, and other paraphernalia. Several things are also striking in the relationships between the protagonists. As regards the women, one may note a tacit contrast between the queen and the pūcārī's concubine. The king's routine is apparently one by which he protects himself and his kingdom. In this regard, the queen appears to be his intermediary as a chaste recipient of the goddess's grace, the prasādam that comes with the flowers offered in pūjā. It is thus always the queen who spots the defiling hair, and it is the queen who sets in train the questions that lead to the discomfiture and eventual exoneration of the pūcārī. She is punctilious where the pūcārī's concubine is carefree. Indeed, there is a sequel story that further accentuates the deficiencies of the queen in contrast to a different concubine.

About two hundred yards to the southeast of the Mēlaccēri temple is a structure called the Tī Pañcaṇ Kōyil, the "Fire Entry Temple." The "temple" itself is an open cupola on four pillars covering a *sati*, or suttee, stone, and adjacent is a cremation platform. It is

Viṣṇu's icon grows hair, one strand of which the king plucks in suspicion, sees it tipped in blood, and, in the Andhra account alone, goes blind. Shulman suggests Andhra and Nāyak origins for the Tamil and Telugu accounts, and proposes that with its Nāyak protagonist, the Tubākki Krishnappa variant might be the "formative" one for the Draupadī cult. This may be so, but the Orissan version widens the historical and geographical considerations.

here, according to one account, that King Cunītaṇ was cremated.³⁴ But the suttee who "entered the fire" was not his wife, the queen, but his own "keeper": a Telugu-speaking Nāyūṭu lady named Kṣatriya Maṅkapāy, whom Cunītaṇ had left provisions for, including the bathing pool (*nīrālī*), now a dried-up overgrown tank, near the Tī Paṅcaṇ Kōyil. In this case, by not performing suttee, the queen fails to display the chastity implied in this wifely prerogative. In the myth of the hair in the flowers, however, the queen's doubts combine with the king's as a double deficiency of bhakti that contrasts directly with the varied "devotions" of the pūcāri and his "keeper." The pūcāri's piety is obvious: he clearly provides the model for all later pūcāri's of the Mēlaccēri and other Draupadī temples in their dealings with kings or with other figures of local or regional "temporal" authority.³⁵ But no less significant is the implicit bhakti of the pūcāri's concubine. Despite the fact that she is the cause of all the trouble, there is never a single bad word said about her. When she adorns herself with the goddess's flowers, it is apparently not so much a case of mischief or vanity as a playful gesture of devotion. One is reminded of the famous Vaiṣṇava saint Aṇṭāl, the girl who would eventually become the mystic bride of Raṅganātha (Viṣṇu), who first showed her natural love of the deity by secretly and playfully donning the garlands that her pious Brahman father—overseer of the temple *tulasi* garden—would prepare daily for the icon in the town of Srivilliputtur (see Das 1964, 52–54).

However, above all, this is a myth about the relationships between the Ammaṇ and two men: the king and the pūcāri. The latter remains anonymous, but there is always a name for the king. And as is already evident, it is on this point—the historical identity of the king—that the myth is most flexible. According to Nārāyaṇaṇ Piḷḷai, in an allusion that must now strike one as a brilliant con-

34. Another oral account makes it the site of Rāja Desing's cremation and the suttee of his wife, both of which Nārāyaṇaṇ Piḷḷai locates beside the Ceṭṭikuḷam within the Gingee Fort (Srinivasachari 1943, 416–17). But Srinivasachari also cites Nārāyaṇaṇ Piḷḷai to the effect that Desing rode near "the cremation ground of the Rajas near Mēlaccēri" (*ibid.*, 413), presumably this same site. There is no confusion between this "Fire Entry Temple" and the firewalking rites that occur nearby.

35. Cf. the stories of British officials who are blinded, like the king of this myth, as a result of their "doubts" about Draupadi, and then have their sight restored when they construct a temple for her (Nambiar et al. 1965, 203, on the Madras Mylapore temple; Shideler 1987, 102, on the Pondicherry temple; Babb 1974, 40–41, on the Singapore temple; cf. also Hildebeitel 1982b, 77 and n. 43; 1985c, 181–82, on a similar story connected with the Gingee buffalo sacrifice). See in addition n. 33 above and Koppedrayar 1986 on the legend of a Thanjavur king temporarily blinded when the walls of a Śiva temple he has ordered destroyed begin to bleed.

denation, it was to Tubākki Krishnappa “that Draupadī-amman, revealing herself, showed the hair in the flower that had been fastened to her [icon].” And according to Adikeshava Pillai, the revelation was made to Cunīta Mahārāja, predecessor of the founding Kōṇār kings. According to Gopala Goundar, the senior trustee at the Mēlaccēri temple, the king’s name was Pirutivirāja, an untraceable figure and rather anonymous name meaning “King of the Earth.” It is not certain that this is a third figure, since on one of the two occasions that he told this story, a listener interjected that Pirutivarāja was the same person as Cunītan. But a fourth name is clearly distinct. According to the version heard by Munacami Naidu from the pāratyār who claimed descent from the story’s pūcāri, the king was none other than Rāja Desing. Four separate versions; three or four different kings. There is no reason to suspect any of our sources of changing the tradition on their own. Rather, one must turn to the history of Gingee itself for an explanation of this mythical imprecision.

As the mythologist casts his eye over the history of Gingee, he is struck that there are three eras that present figures whose lives and times are fuller than “mere” history would allow. Leaving out the indeterminate Pirutivirāja—the name may recall that of the primal king Pr̥thu of classical mythology—each of the other kings who questions the pūcāri is either the most prominent royal figure of such an era or is linked with such a figure. First is Cunīta Mahārāja, the swing figure between his Pāṇḍava ancestors and his distant descendants, the early Kōṇ kings of Gingee (ca. 1190–1260). Second is Tubākki Krishnappa, first of the regular Nāyaks of Gingee (ca. 1509–21). And third is Rāja Desing (d. 1714). Indeed, the three historical eras thus evoked are the three chief “moments” in the history of Gingee that were set forth in chapter 2.

If one looks at the periods of these three kings, it is easy to see how each has supplied our story with an alternate royal protagonist. The first two periods are ones of fabulous beginnings. The stories of Cunītan and the early Kōṇ kings, when set in sequence, combine to account not only for the transformation of a shepherd people into kings, but for kings linked with the heroes and heroines of the *Mahābhārata*. The stories of Tubākki Krishnappa recall his reign as a sort of Nāyak golden age, a period of peace and ordered harmony under the most celebrated of the Vijayanagar emperors, Krishnadeva Rāya, a time when the three southern Nāyaks of Gingee, Thanjavur, and Madurai are supposed to have accepted the imperial definition of their domains and harbored no thoughts of independence or rebellion. Thus Nārāyaṇan Pillai continues his

Mackenzie manuscript account of Tubākki Krishnappa's founding of the Mēlaccēri temple:

When Draupadī-amman had revealed herself to the king, the kings of Madurai, Tiruchirappalli, and Thanjavur in their own regions had royal *gopurams* and walls built for the great temples. So when the Gingee king first paid tribute to the royal residence of the [Vijayanagar] Rāyar, the kings came to undertake their rule without cruelty [*niṣṭuramillāmal*]. (Dikshitar 1952, 25; Diagou 1939, 31)

As to Rāja Desing, one has of course no founding myth or golden age. It is in fact rare to find him associated with Draupadī cult traditions, as most informants link him only with Raṅganātha and Durgamma, the deities he worships in his ballad. But even though it is rare, it is not surprising when one does find him connected with Draupadī.³⁶ The *Ballad of Rāja Desing* celebrates a heroic geste and recalls a sad and desperate time as the setting for a regional heroic age in which for one brief moment the Hindu values of the Gingee country found their full crystallization in the story of a young Rajput prince, his Muslim ally, his chaste young queen, and his magical horse. In its evocation of a "heroic" rather than a "golden" age (see Hildebeitel 1976a, 27–59; 1982c; 1984b), one might expect to find certain affinities and connections between this regional tradition—best described as a folk epic—and the pan-Indian classical epic, the *Mahābhārata*. Such affinities do occur in other South Indian, and also North Indian, folk epic traditions (Hildebeitel 1984b). Actually, the *Ballad of Rāja Desing* has less overt relation to the *Mahābhārata* than do some of the older of these other folk epics. This in part may be due to its relatively young age, but more significantly, to the fact that the *Rāja Tēciṅku Katai* flourished in an area where the Draupadī cult had already saturated the region with alternate folk transformations of the *Mahābhārata*. There are, however, common features between the *Ballad of Rāja Desing* and the folk version of the *Mahābhārata* popularized by the Draupadī cult. One of these is the prominence in each accorded to the figure of a Muslim—Mōvuttukkāraṅ in the ballad, Muttāl Rāvuttan in the folk epic—who becomes the devoted battle-companion and subordinate, if not servant, of the heroes and heroines who champion the Hindu ideal of the little kingdom and its royal dharma.

36. There are oral traditions connecting the origin, or early patronage, of the Terukkūttu with Rāja Desing (personal communication from Richard Frasca).

6

Muttāl Rāvuttan: Draupadī's Muslim Devotee

We have now met Muttāl Rāvuttan in various settings and have drawn the inference that his regular, if not universal, association with Draupadī in the area of the former kingdom(s) of Gingee reflects the manner in which the Draupadī cult registered the area's early encounter with Islam. It is not certain that Muttāl Rāvuttan was part of the Draupadī cult from its beginnings, though I would lean to the view that he was.¹ But whether he was an original feature or not, his place in the cult—peripheral as it may often seem—provides us with an invaluable insight into the historical factors that lie behind the cult's consolidation in the Gingee area.

More precisely, it seems that the presence of Muttāl Rāvuttan in the Draupadī cult reflects the catalytic impact of Islam upon the local formation—or better, reformulation—of the Hindu ideal of the “little kingdom.” Sontheimer points to a similar background for the Maharashtrian cult of Khaṇḍobā: “With the establishment of local rulers during the Muslim and Marāthā period we find the rise of gods like Khaṇḍobā, Mairāl/Mailār, and Kālḥairav” (Sontheimer 1978, 115).² In many respects, as we shall see, Muttāl Rāvuttan is a counterpart to Khaṇḍobā.

To understand the impact of Islam in such cases, however, one must not view it simply as a spur to opposition or Hindu self-entrenchment. The little kingdom ideal is not without its global

1. Alternatively, one could argue that Muttāl Rāvuttan is superimposed on the Draupadī cult. But I know of no evidence that lends itself to reconstructing a prior cult without him.

2. Cf. Sontheimer, in press: “Perhaps from the 14th century onwards we find the rise of folk deities. . . . The greatest temples of Viṣṇu and Śiva decay and gods like Mairāl-Mailār, that is, *kṣetrapālas*, rise.” Cf. chap. 2, n. 11, on the Draupadī cult in this period, and also Meyer 1984, 74: the Tamil Aṅkāḷamman cult most likely dates from the thirteenth or fourteenth century.

Hindu vision.³ Generally, Islam is accorded an ambivalent status, one that acknowledges its distinctiveness while at the same time requiring its subordination to, and incorporation within, the higher values of bhakti as they are defined in relation to regional forms of pan-Hindu bhakti deities. Indeed, the figure of Khaṇḍobā presents such a profile: he is a *kṣetrapāla* ("field-protector," that is, a god who protects a "terrain") linked to the higher cult of Śiva; the "tutelary deity [*kuladevatā*] of many of the reigning Maratha families" (Sontheimer 1978, 115); and the object of worship not only of Hindus but of certain Muslims. Indeed one Muslim, Babulal Rasul Khan (my guide through Jejuri in 1974) has the ceremonial role of leading Khaṇḍobā's horse at the head of the procession at one of Khaṇḍobā's main annual Jejuri festivals. Moreover, in some places, Khaṇḍobā is given Muslim names such as Mallu Khān or Ajmat Khān, the latter supposedly bestowed by Aurangzeb, "who was compelled to flee from Khaṇḍobā's power" (Sontheimer 1984, 163; see also Stanley 1977, 36 and n. 45).

Other similar instances of symbolic Muslim incorporation within regional cults are not uncommon (Coccari 1986, 127–48; Bharati 1981, 76–77). What is striking about Muttāl Rāvuttan is that it is specifically as a Muslim that he figures as a Kṣetrapāla who "protects the field" of the little kingdom whose ultimately Hindu ideal the Draupadī cult espouses. With these considerations in mind, we may now look more closely at this anomalous figure: first at the god himself, and then at the myths, iconography, and rituals that define his relation to Draupadī and his role in her cult.

As we noted in chapter 3, the name Muttāl Rāvuttan derives its second element from a term meaning Muslim cavalier, horseman, or trooper. The term comes from Urdu *rāut*, apparently via a Prakrit derivation from either *rāja-dūta* ("King's messenger") or *rāja-putra* ("prince").⁴ The title "Rāvuttan" is used by Muslims in certain districts of Tamilnadu (Madurai, Tirunelveli, Coimbatore, North Arcot, Nilgiris) who claim that they were converted to Islam by the preaching of missionaries, one of the earliest and most important of whom, Sayyid Nathar Shāh (969–1039; also called Nadir Shāh and Nathad Vali), made his headquarters at Tiruchirappalli, where his tomb is a place of pilgrimage (Titus [1930] 1959, 48; cf. Thurston and Rangachari 1904, 6: 247). It is thus possible that

3. See Dumont 1980, 154–64; Dirks 1979, 200–205. Not only does Rāja Desing have his loyal Muslim ally; his Muslim opponent, Sadatullah Khān, has Hindu advisors and finally agrees that Desing should be killed only after resisting such advice by the Hindu king of Veṅkatagiri.

4. I thank Lee Weissman for digging this information out of several Hindi dictionaries.

the name is linked in this usage to an early period of peaceful conversions in the south, as Titus insists. But in the Draupadī cult, the term clearly evokes its common and traditional association of the Muslim warrior on horseback, whether he is the Sufi warrior leading his band of followers (see Eaton 1978, 19–44) or the leader of an army of conquest.

As a deity, Muttāl Rāvuttan has a shadowy existence not only within the Draupadī cult but beyond it. Oppert (1893, 482) indicates that Māriyamman shrines may (he does not indicate where) show her surrounded by numerous attendants, including “her servants Muttyālu and Rāvuttan.” Here the god seems to have split into two identities. Masilamani-Meyer has found him in Thanjavur District as an attendant to Draupadī, and probably at Aiyānar shrines (see n. 29 below). Thurston notes that low-caste Valaiyaṅs (net-makers, mainly fishermen) in the Tiruchirappalli District “have a special caste god, named Muttāl Rāvuttan, who is the spirit of a dead Muhammadan, about whom nothing seems to be known” (Thurston and Rangachari 1904, 7: 279).⁵ Here the god seems to have nothing to do with the Draupadī cult, or for that matter with any other deity, although the fact that Valaiyaṅs have a subdivision called “Vanniya” (ibid., 274–75) may indicate that they maintain relations with Vaṇṇiyars. As we shall see, Vaṇṇiyars are not alone at the Draupadī temple shrines where Muttāl Rāvuttan is worshipped as a Kuladeva.

Even within the Draupadī cult itself, however, his obscurity does not diminish. The available bibliography on the cult almost totally overlooks him.⁶ Moreover, his mythology is rarely known, or at least not known in any detail, by ordinary followers of the cult. When asked about him, local informants would frequently look embarrassed and then admit surprise when it came up that he was a Muslim.⁷ It is, of course, possible that the ignorance and surprise were sometimes feigned: as we shall see, there are things about Muttāl Rāvuttan that could, and in at least one case did, prompt concealment. But in most cases the informants’ bafflement was surely genuine. Sometimes his name has been replaced by a more

5. There is also a possible but obscure reference to Muttāl Rāvuttan in Thurston and Rangachari 1904, 6: 31: a Vaṇṇiyar Poligar named Nainar, “who conquered Rāya Rāvutha and mounted a fire horse.”

6. The only known exceptions are Babb 1974, map 1 (Singapore temple, see chap. 4), and Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi 1977a, 548, on which see below.

7. Not only did the Tindivanam pūcāri “forget” that Muttāl Rāvuttan was a Muslim, the pāratīyār Venkatesha Bhagavata did not know it, informants at Pondicherry were “surprised,” and so on.

generalized Muslim name, such as at Kalahasti, where he is called Muhammad Khan (see Hildebeitel, in press). And sometimes he has lost his Muslim identity altogether. We have already noticed one such instance at Singapore, where he has the Hinduized (or at least de-Islamicized) name of Muttāla Rāja (Babb 1974, map 1). Similarly, at Nallāṇpettāl, his apparently shortened name, inset into a small new concrete maṇḍapa that was constructed over his rectangular stone icon on 1 June 1966, yields the form Āl Rāja ("Banyan King"?).⁸ It is not only through Kṣatriya titles that he is Hinduized. One informant, the ever idiosyncratic Adikeshava Bharatiyar, possibly drawing on the Urdu derivation of Rāvuttan, asserted that *rāut* (or *irāvut*) was a name for North Indian Brahmins. Thus Muttāl Rāvuttan was a Brahman minister (*mantrin*) to King Cūṇitan in the North Indian kingdom of Gingee (see chap. 5, n. 1). As we have already observed in chapter 5, and as we will discuss further in chapter 16 and 17, alternate caste identities are also supplied for Muttāl Rāvuttan's guardian companion, Pōttu Rāja.

In my own research, it was only after my assistant C. T. Rajan and I had heard the name a number of times that Rajan was suddenly struck by the fact that Rāvuttan is a Muslim title. Until then, no informant had made this connection, and the first one at hand, the Tindivanam pūcāri, was among those who now claimed to have "forgotten" it. It soon became apparent that no other feature of Draupadī cult mythology was more fragmented and obscure. Local informants, unfamiliar with the cult's diversity, usually proved to have only the most meager information. Generally only the cult's itinerant specialists—the pāratīyārs, Terukkūttu dramatists, the sculptor Dandapani, who made and repaired Draupadī temple icons—could shed any light upon him. The versions they tell, different as they are, have all benefited from their own reflections on the many variants they have encountered themselves: from their own teachers and other masters and students of their arts, from textual sources, and from the countless local transformations of the stories that they hear and see on their professional travels from temple to temple and festival to festival.

After our first sample on Pōttu Rāja we will not, of course, be surprised to find variants in Muttāl Rāvuttan's mythology. Indeed, as with Pōttu Rāja, the variants organize themselves roughly into two groups: those that connect Muttāl Rāvuttan with a "post-

8. Cf. Titus [1930] 1959, 146: the Muslim saint *Kh*wāja *Kh*idr "goes by various names, such as Rāja Kidar, where Hindu influence is strong." Curiously, my Nallāṇpettāl informant knew that "Āl Rāja" was a Muslim.

Mahābhārata mythology of Gingee, and those that connect him with the *Mahābhārata* itself. In Muttāl Rāvuttan's case, we will find compelling reasons to treat the two groups together. Accordingly, we begin at Gingee.

A. Muttāl Rāvuttan at Gingee: The Sacrifice of the Pregnant Sister

According to my two main dramatist informants, there are two basic stories concerning Muttāl Rāvuttan: one known locally at Draupadī temples, and the other known primarily through one of the rarer of their Terukkūttu dramas. As the latter is our main source for Muttāl Rāvuttan's *Mahābhārata* mythology, we shall turn to it shortly. Knowing both stories themselves, the dramatist brothers judged that while neither is well known, the local temple account is the more obscure. Indeed, it must be said that no one else ever volunteered the story, and on the few occasions when I asked at local temples whether it was familiar, the answer was invariably that it was not. It is, however, a rather gruesome tale with anti-Muslim overtones, and it is possible that some informants may have wanted either to spare my ears or to keep it a secret. One suspects that it was the latter motivation that prompted the two dramatists to claim for several of our meetings, and over a period of several months, that they knew nothing further about Muttāl Rāvuttan than the content of their drama. It was only after I began to ask them on-the-spot questions about Muttāl Rāvuttan's icons and cult at the Draupadī temple in their own village of Pakkiri-pālaiyam that they decided, after a brief private conference, to divulge the following story:

Muttāl Rāvuttan, like Draupadī, was born in Gingee. One night he dreamt that Draupadī-amman told him that she would grant him any favor he wished if he would sacrifice a pregnant woman to her. Muttāl Rāvuttan had a pregnant sister named Pal Varicai ("Row of Teeth"). He took her before Draupadī ready to sacrifice her. Draupadī appreciated his dedication, but stopped the sacrifice, thinking: "She is a woman like me." She told Muttāl Rāvuttan that she would grant him a boon: whatever he thinks of will be done; but he must give up his religion [*matam*] and come serve her at her residence [i.e., her temple]: "Serving at my feet, you can live with me." Muttāl Rāvuttan thus gave up his religion from that day on and came to serve Draupadī-amman. She receives all the milk offerings, and also offerings of flowers, vegetables,

and fruits. Life sacrifices [*uyirināṅkal paliyitūtal*, i.e., blood sacrifice] are all offered to Muttāl Rāvuttaṅ: cocks, goats, even humans. So it was agreed on that day.

This story is clearly concerned with themes of sacrificial violence, and in particular with inversions of what acceptable sacrificial violence entails. Muttāl Rāvuttaṅ is willing to sacrifice not only a woman (sacrificial victims are usually males), and not only his younger sister, but his pregnant younger sister. It is possible that when Draupadī recoils from her request for a pregnant female victim, she is implicitly differentiating her cult from that of Aṅkāḷamman, for whom pregnant women are victimized in myth and pregnant goats offered up in ritual (Meyer 1984, 214, 228, 246). But it is only when we look behind this account to the mythologies and cults of certain similar South Indian male deities that we can grasp some of the story's underlying themes and missing connections.

First of all, stories of this type—which Arunachalam (1976, 187–94) has written about under the inspired heading “ballads glorifying criminals”—are ordinarily not about Muslims but about Untouchables, or at least about heroes with Untouchable affinities or involvements.⁹ One can thus safely infer that the Draupadī cult has transposed an “Untouchable” role—the handling of extreme sacrificial violence and its impurity—onto a Muslim. If one compares this account with its closest known analogue, a myth of Cuṭalai Māṭaṅ reported by Reiniche, many of its implicit and most nefarious themes are illuminated.

To begin with—and I must introduce the discussion with some remarks on the essentials of the comparison¹⁰—both myths concern *mantiravāṭis* (Sanskrit *mantravāḍi*), that is, “mantra-speakers” or magicians, and in particular black magicians. Though it was not mentioned in the dramatists’ furtive account, we may regard Muttāl Rāvuttaṅ’s *mantravāḍi* status as assured, for it is central to most other accounts, including the dramatists’ own play about him.¹¹

9. Arunachalam’s main examples are Kāttavarāyaṅ, Maturai Virāṅ, and Cuṭalai Māṭaṅ; cf. also Meyer 1984, 81–83, on Pāvāṭairāyaṅ and Virabhadra in the cult of Aṅkāḷamman.

10. There are features of Cuṭalai Māṭaṅ’s cult and mythology that also link him with Pōttu Rāja; see Biarreau (in press) on the implications of the etymology of Māṭaṅ from *mātu* (“bull”).

11. The exceptions (propounded by *pāratyārs*) reveal as much by their rejections of Muttāl Ravuttaṅ’s *mantravāḍi* status as they do by their would-be refinements. Thus Adikeshava Bharatiyar insists that Muttāl Rāvuttaṅ is a *mantrin* (a Brahman advisor), not a *mantravāḍi*, the latter notion being but an opinion of the ignorant; and Brameesa Mudaliyar regarded all Muttāl Rāvuttaṅ stories as crude popular fantasies and distortions of both the *Mahābhārata* and the Gingee cycle of stories.

In the Cuṭalai Māṭaṇ myth reported from oral sources by Reiniche, it is not stated that the Māṭaṇ is a mantravādi himself. Rather, he subdues an Untouchable (Pulaiyar) mantravādi from Kerala, eventually bringing about the latter's destruction. But in the *Cuṭalai Māṭaṇ Katai*, a literary "ballad" version of the story summarized by Arunachalam, Cuṭalai Māṭaṇ "learnt some witchcraft" from the goddess Bhagavati before his sojourn in Kerala. His defeat of the Pulaiyar then has an immediate sequel in which he plunders the riches of the Muslims (Labbaïs; cf. Titus [1930] 1959, 41), who must themselves hire magicians (apparently Hindu: one is called Ramalinga Kodangi) to subdue Cuṭalai Māṭaṇ and confine him to his place as a recipient of festival offerings (Arunachalam 1976, 191–92). In any case, it is Reiniche's account of the episode in Kerala, with its contest between Cuṭalai Māṭaṇ and the Pulaiyar mantravādi, that interests us most directly:

When Cuṭalai Māṭaṇ goes to Kerala, he first seduces ["rapes"; Arunachalam 1976, 191] the daughter of this "very powerful *mantravādi*," and "by subterfuge" makes her pregnant. He then destroys the crops of the farmers, who appeal to the *mantravādi* to make amends. The *mantravādi* momentarily succeeds in "binding" the Māṭaṇ by promising him the sacrifices of a pregnant goat, a pregnant sow, and also a young girl pregnant for the first time. But when the Māṭaṇ escapes from his bondage [a "box"], he demands the promised sacrifice, including the *mantravādi*'s own daughter [it is not specified, but Blackburn (1981, 223) records another version where it is clear that she is the same girl whom the Māṭaṇ had seduced]. Cuṭalai Māṭaṇ then arranges to have the *mantravādi* himself also sacrificed by the king of the country: buried up to his neck, he is trampled by the royal elephants. Then, content with having avoided the magician's "Vedic rites" [his mantras?], and satiated with all the sacrifices that he had initiated, he returns to Tirunelveli where—after more adventures—he becomes established as the guardian of various gods and goddesses. (Reiniche 1979, 205–7).

Though the two myths have their differences, they are clearly multiforms of a widely diffused "criminal god" mythology. Indeed, they are structured around certain issues and themes that allow us to recognize these two "heroes" as "criminal gods" of an extreme type. For while other similar figures share something of their "criminal" record (for example, rape) and their associations with impure sacrificial offerings, few share their predilections for pregnant female victims and their involvement with black magic.

We are left in little doubt that there are real mantravādi practices that lie behind these mythic extremes. It would appear that throughout Tamilnadu, as also in Coorg (Srinivas 1965, 183) and Sri Lanka (Obeyesekere 1984, 309), Kerala has a reputation for its mantravādis and their black magic. Reiniche (1979, 206–8) mentions that Kerala has such a reputation in Tirunelveli District, and my assistant, C. T. Rajan, a “northern Tamilian” originally from Salem District, specified that in Malappuram District in Kerala, there are said to be mantravādis who can transform themselves into insects, buffaloes, snakes, monkeys, cows, and small fish. Noting that the Paraiyans of Malabar “are celebrated for their knowledge of black magic,” Thurston supplies the following information on their cult (known as *oṭi*, “breaking the human body”) and its initiation ceremonies:

They are supposed to be able to entice pregnant women from their houses at dead of night, to destroy the embryo in the womb, and substitute another substance for it. . . . The guru initiates [the disciple] into the brotherhood by the performance of pūjā on an auspicious day to his favorite Nīli,¹² . . . through whose aid he works his black art. Flesh and liquor are consumed, and the disciple taught to prepare pillā thilam and angola thilam, which are the potent medicines for the working of his cult. The chief ingredient in the preparation of pillā thilam, or baby oil, is the sixth or seventh month’s foetus of a primapara. (Thurston and Rangachari 1904, 6: 122)

The account continues to tell how the novice mantravādi selects a young victim, compels her to come out of her house with mantras and yantras drawn on the ground, leads her mesmerized to a remote spot, strips her naked, tells her to lie flat on the ground, extracts the foetus into a gourd, cuts it into pieces, extracts its liquid (*thilam*), mixes it with fine powder from a human skull (a vivid image of the Tantric transcendence over the impurities of birth and death), rubs the mixture over various parts of his body, all in order “to assume the form of any animal he likes, and achieve his object in view, be it murder or bodily injury” (*ibid.*, 125–26).

It must be pointed out that a mantravādi may be of any caste or sect, or may even—as our Draupadī cult myth insists—be Muslim. Certainly not all mantravādis are to be identified with such

12. Nīli, “the blue goddess,” is recognized widely in Tamilnadu for her associations with sorcery (see Arunachalam 1976, 209).

practices as those just described.¹³ But it is clear that they are as implicit in the myth of Muttāl Rāvuttan as they are explicit in the myth of Cuṭalai Māṭan. Here we may observe that each myth also evolves a strategy whereby these practices are brought to their termination. In each myth, the mantravādi is subdued. In the case of Cuṭalai Māṭan, the matter is complex. Apparently a mantravādi himself, Cuṭalai Māṭan first kills the Pulaiyan mantravādi after requiring him to perform his odious sacrifices. But the Māṭan himself reaps their benefit: only then does he begin his more ordinary "criminal" career before finally subordinating himself to the higher Hindu gods—most notably Subrahmaṇya—as a recipient of bloody offerings (including buffalo sacrifices) (Reiniche 1979, 206–7). As to Muttāl Rāvuttan, it would seem from our frustratingly brief account that Draupadī inspires the dream that brings him to the point of sacrificing his pregnant younger sister. If this is so, she apparently does it to bring him before her so that he will become her servant—the guardian who accepts animal "and human" offerings—and give up not only his Muslim religion but his mantravādi ways. Yet his renunciations are only partial. In "converting" to the worship of Draupadī, Muttāl Rāvuttan also retains these traits, turning his Muslim "meat-eating" religion and his mantravādi gifts to the advantage of the "purer" Hindu deity whose grace and favor now extend, in return, to include certain followers of Islam.

We cannot leave this account, however, without noting that it is intriguingly incomplete. How is it that Muttāl Rāvuttan's younger sister, this "Row of Teeth" (Pal Varicai), comes to be pregnant? (What horrors lies behind this name? Should one suspect a *vagina dentata* image?) We hear of no husband. And how is Muttāl Rāvuttan so easily subdued and converted by Draupadī-amman? One is again tempted to look to the Cuṭalai Māṭan myth for potential answers. Cuṭalai Māṭan, ultimately in the service of Hindu gods and goddesses (he worships Kanyākumārī, the virgin goddess of Cape Comorin, just before going to Kerala), impregnates the mantravādi's daughter himself. Does Draupadī have someone in her

13. Such rites are also performed by Pānāns (see Thurston and Rangachari 1904, 6: 38–39). On the marginal status of the mantravādi and his mastery over demons, see Reiniche 1979, 216. According to Guy R. Welbon (personal communication), there are Brahman Vaikhānasa mantravādīs. Cf. also Ayrookuzhiel 1983, 145–53, including his reference to an apparently Muslim mantravādi named Azeez Thangal. Ayrookuzhiel includes a remark by one present-day informant that pregnant women should not go near certain trees or the abodes of certain "evil powers"—the gods Poṭṭan and Guḷikan associated with sorcery—"or they may suffer a miscarriage."

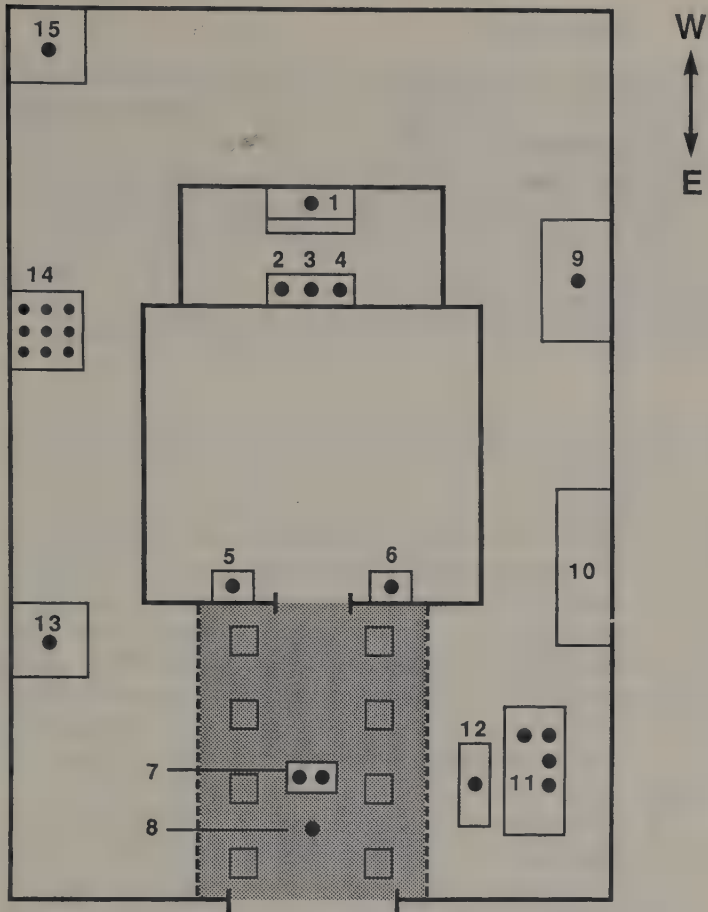
service to do the same with Muttāl Rāvuttan̄'s sister? Cuṭalai Māṭan then subdues the mantravādi, arranging to have him sacrificed. Does Draupadī have someone in her service to subdue Muttāl Rāvuttan̄? The answer to the first question is a qualified yes, with two provisos: (1) the girl in question is not Muttāl Rāvuttan̄'s sister but his daughter (as in the Cuṭalai Māṭan̄ myth), and (2) it is no longer a question of her impregnation but of her marriage. The answer to the second question is an unqualified yes: Draupadī has Pōttu Rāja (or more precisely Pōrmaṇṇan̄). In fact, the affirmative answers to both questions presuppose the prior mythology of Pōttu Rāja-Pōrmaṇṇan̄. They emerge from our second Muttāl Rāvuttan̄ myth, one that links him not only with Pōrmaṇṇan̄ but with the *Mahābhārata*. We must now entertain the hypothesis that this second myth is a further multiform, reset and largely purified of its nefarious elements, of Muttāl Rāvuttan̄'s mantravādi mythology.

B. Muttāl Rāvuttan̄'s Conquests and Subjugation

Local informants at Draupadī temples tell a number of stories that connect Muttāl Rāvuttan̄ with the *Mahābhārata*. But most such traditions are highly fragmentary. Thus informants claimed that Muttāl Rāvuttan̄ (Muttāla Turai) performed an eighteen-day pūjā to help the Pāṇḍavas at Kurukṣetra; that he and Pōttu Rāja were friends and that both were generals who fought for the Pāṇḍavas there; or that he drove Pōttu Rāja's war chariot.¹⁴ A more elaborate local tradition comes from the highly interesting Draupadī temple at Chinna Salem (Kallakuruchi Taluk, South Arcot District), a temple whose festival Francis described eighty years ago as being "famous throughout the south-western corner of South Arcot," its firewalk "perhaps a more serious ordeal than in any other place in the district" (1906, 328; see also map 5 below). Here Muttāl Rāvuttan̄ becomes involved in epic affairs that go beyond the Kurukṣetra battlefield:

Muttāl Rāvuttan̄ was the field general [*cēnāpati*] of a king named Muttāla Mahārāja, who ruled over the North Indian kingdom of Muttālappuram. This king had no son, only a daughter named Muttālakkanni, whom he married to Dharma [i.e., Yudhiṣṭhira]. When Muttālakkanni was married to Dharma, Muttāla Mahārāja gave Dharma all the wealth of his kingdom, offering Muttāl Rāvuttan̄ some remaining property

14. These three assertions were made, in order, at Tindivanam, Nallāṇpettāl, and Mēlcāttamankalam respectively.



- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Seated Draupadī (<i>mūlavar</i>) | 10. Shed for 13 Wooden Processional Icons |
| 2-4. Kṛṣṇa, Draupadī, Arjuna (<i>pañcaloha</i> processional icons) | 11. Muttāl Rāvuttan, 2 servants, Toddy Pot, and Dog |
| 5. Tenkālī ("South Kālī" as door-guardian) | 12. Muttāl Rāvuttan's Horse |
| 6. Vatakkālī ("North Kālī" as door-guardian) | 13. Turcātai (Duḥśālā) Maṇḍapa, or Kāliyamman Caṇṇiti |
| 7. Pōrmanṇan and Caṅkuvati | 14. Nine Planets |
| 8. Flagstaff | 15. Gaṇeśa-Vināyakar |
| 9. Paṭṭattu Amman | |

Map 5. The Chinna Salem Draupadi Temple

to retire to. But Muttāl Rāvuttan̄ declined, as he did not want to go where he would be without the wealth of the kingdom and without Muttālakkann̄i, to whom he had always been devoted and whom he wanted to serve until his death. So he determined to accompany her and came as part of the kingdom that was handed over to Dharmarāja. Dharmarāja and all the other Pāṇḍavas agreed, and Muttāl Rāvuttan̄ was appointed the task of guarding the northern gate of their palace [*araṇṇan̄ai*] as their gatekeeper [*kopuravācal*].

This account has certain affinities with the Muttāl Rāvuttan̄ story that is enacted in the Terukkūttu, to which we must turn in a moment. It would seem to be a distant multiform of it, a version that has survived at the level of local temple lore in a town which falls outside the circuit of the *Mahābhārata*-performing Terukkūttu troupes. The Chinna Salem narrators were well aware that Muttāl Rāvuttan̄ was a Muslim, a worshipper of Allah. But they could offer no further clarification on the intriguing figures of Muttālakkann̄i, bride of Dharma, and her father, Muttāla Mahārāja, relinquisher of his kingdom, other than that they were Hindus. It will only be after we examine the Terukkūttu version of Muttāl Rāvuttan̄'s story that we can propose an explanation of these multiple Muttālas.

As to the Terukkūttu story, we have already noted our dramatists' judgment that it is better known than their temple tale about Muttāl Rāvuttan̄ and his sister Pal Varicai. The judgment is probably sound, though my only other informant who knew the basics of the dramatized story was the sculptor Dandapani. As a play, it is rarely performed at Draupadī temples. My informants' troupe had had only one request for it, at Vaṭa Ālappākkam, about two kilometers east of Tindivanam. There it was performed separately from the main cycle of *Mahābhārata* plays, a fact that differentiates it most significantly from the drama *Pōrman̄nan̄ Caṇṭai*, the main play about Pōttu Rāja.

That play, as later chapters will show, can be integrated very centrally into the epic drama cycles that are performed at Draupadī festivals. Indeed, this is one of the points that has led me to treat Muttāl Rāvuttan̄'s drama now, saving discussion of *Pōrman̄nan̄ Caṇṭai* for my study of the Draupadī cult's epic mythology. Nevertheless, the drama about Muttāl Rāvuttan̄ presupposes *Pōrman̄nan̄ Caṇṭai* for its linkage with the *Mahābhārata*. The very title of the drama—"The Marriage of Allimuttu and Mallikā, called the Pōr-

maṇṇan—Muttāl Rāvuttan combat¹⁵—calls attention to the confrontation between these two stalwarts. In brief, the Muttāl Rāvuttan play takes off from the conclusion of *Pōrmaṇṇan Caṇṭai*, in which Pōrmaṇṇan marries the Pāṇḍavas' sister, Caṅkuvati (herself a nonclassical figure). The second drama then introduces their son, Allimuttu, who has had time to grow up in a rather indefinitely defined postwar period. Let us now summarize the story of this Muttāl Rāvuttan play as it was performed in a condensed version by the Pakkiripālaiyam drama troupe.¹⁶ Note that in the Terukkūttu fashion, all parts are played by men.

Muttāl Rāvuttan enters the stage wearing a long dark blue *kurta* [shirt] and a red, green, and yellow turban. He sings of himself boastfully as a great mantravādi, one who knows all the mantras and tantras. In this vein, he tells that Mallikā (soon to appear) is not his actual daughter: he had obtained her through the power of his mantras [*mantraśakti*]. Nonetheless, he loves her greatly, and now sends for her.

Mallikā then comes out, flirts with the play's jester-interlocutor [the Kaṭṭiyaṅkāraṇ], and boasts further of her father's prowess. Muttāl Rāvuttan then sends her to a forest garden [*nantavanam*] to get flowers. There she plays *kummi* [a rhythmic game of song, dance, and clapping].

At this point Pōrmaṇṇan's wife, Caṅkuvati [humorously wearing sunglasses], comes along, calling for her son Allimuttu. Allimuttu enters, and tells his mother he is going to the forest to hunt. When he sees Mallikā, he falls literally head over heels in love with her, toppling onto several sleeping children in the audience in his outburst of passion. Unable to contain his desire, he starts humping the Kaṭṭiyaṅkāraṇ.¹⁷ Then, after chasing Mallikā all about, he finally manages to begin flirting with her and quickly asks her to marry him. She replies—to the Kaṭṭiyaṅkāraṇ, but in Allimuttu's hearing—that she does indeed like this boy. He is very handsome. But her father won't allow her to marry

15. Allimuttu Mallikā Tirumaṇam ennum Pōrmaṇṇan-Muttāl Rāvuttan Caṇṭai. The chap-book version of this play, once published by the now defunct Śrī Vāṇi Vilācam Press of Cuddalore, is now—like so many of their invaluable publications—no longer available (after my most persistent search and inquiry).

16. The manner in which these dramas were arranged and performed will be described in chap. 7, sec. C.

17. Cf. chap. 16, sec. A: such lustful antics are a family trait, presumably inherited from his father, Pōrmaṇṇan.

anyone. He is a Muslim and a great mantravādi, able to do whatever he wishes through his mantraśakti. Moreover, he has the boon that he cannot be defeated or killed by anyone who is born through a womb [*yonippirappu*]. Only if he is subdued [*aṭakku*] can their marriage take place. Allimuttu, undaunted, says the Pāṇḍavas are his maternal uncles.¹⁸ They will help him.

Allimuttu goes to Dharma and tells him his story. Dharma calls the five Pāṇḍavas together to subdue Muttāl Rāvuttan, and they go with Allimuttu to fight him. But Muttāl Rāvuttan's mantras deprive the Pāṇḍavas of all their strength, and he takes them off to imprison them.

Now Kṛṣṇa comes to the rescue. He praises the Pāṇḍavas' pride in challenging Muttāl Rāvuttan. But he says they can only be freed, and Muttāl Rāvuttan subdued, if his sister Draupadī joins with Pōrmannan to defeat him. He then enlists Draupadī's and Pōrmannan's aid. It is Draupadī, born from fire and thus not born from a womb, who can defeat Muttāl Rāvuttan.

Draupadī sends Pōrmannan to fight Muttāl Rāvuttan. When he approaches, Muttāl Rāvuttan asks him, "Who is your mother?" Pōrmannan says his mother is Draupadī, the lady who is uniquely chaste [*ekappattiṇi turōpatai*], an apparent indication that his birth too is extraordinary. He tells Muttāl Rāvuttan: "Draupadī-amman says we must fight your arrogance [*ānavam*]. We have the *vīrappampai*, *vīraccāṭṭi*, *vīrakkantakam*, *vīramallāri*, *uṭukkai*—all five implements" [various cultic instruments; see table 10].

Muttāl Rāvuttan recognizes immediately that his mantras are ineffective against Pōrmannan, Draupadī, and the five cultic implements. He says, "Don't fight me. Without a fight I am ready to be your slave [*aṭimai*]." He then asks for refuge [*caraṇākati*] at Draupadī's feet.

Mallikā then asks Draupadī what her father should do. Draupadī says henceforth he can sit at the north side of her residence or temple [*ālayam*] and be ready to fight for her at all times. She tells Muttāl Rāvuttan to let his daughter marry Allimuttu. He agrees and ties her *tālī* [marriage badge].

It is possible now to propose some likely continuities between this story and the Chinna Salem version of Muttāl Rāvuttan's myth.

18. Placing the Pāṇḍavas in a position where they should arrange his marriage, though ideally with one of their own daughters.

Clearly the latter account multiplies the figures identified by the name Muttāla. Instead of just one, there are three. What seems to have happened, however, is that Muttāl Rāvuttan's identity has been split: in one aspect, the Muslim field-general who comes to serve Draupadī and guard her northern gate, he remains Muttāl Rāvuttan; in the other, the father of the girl whose marriage into the Pāṇḍava family secures his service to Draupadī, he becomes the Hindu king Muttāla Mahārāja (whose name reminds us that Muttāla Rāja or its equivalents are often alternates for Muttāl Rāvuttan). As to Muttālakkanni, she is not, like Mallikā in the drama, the daughter of Muttāl Rāvuttan; rather she is the daughter of his "double," the Hindu king. But it is still Muttāl Rāvuttan's love for this daughter that leads him to come with her, with all his kingdom's wealth, to serve the Pāṇḍavas. One may also suspect that Muttālakkanni's wedding to Dharma, a Hindu marriage, eliminates the tensions of the Hindu-Muslim marriage between Allimuttu and Mallikā. The Chinna Salem informants had not heard of either of these latter figures.

I do not mean to insist that the Chinna Salem version is a direct transformation of the drama. More likely, both myths proceed from reflections on a common stock of cultic traditions concerning Muttāl Rāvuttan. Indeed, I have remarked upon other possible transformational affinities between the drama and the story with which we began this chapter (also attributed to local temple traditions) about Muttāl Rāvuttan's willingness to sacrifice his own sister. We may now note further that even in the Terukkūttu drama, Muttāl Rāvuttan holds his daughter, whom he has created by his mantras, in a kind of magical enthrallment. And in each case, it is an action of Draupadī that in effect rescues the girl from this situation. These revolving affinities point us toward an issue we will address in part 2 of our study: the relations between local performance genres (myth-telling, locally performed dramas, rituals) and the itinerant Terukkūttu.

The dramatists' story was familiar in its basic contours to one other informant, the sculptor Dandapani. From his account, two matters are worth noting. First, Muttāl Rāvuttan receives his boon of invulnerability by performing tapas to Śiva: he is an ardent Śivabhakta as well as a Muslim and a mantravādi. Second, it is not only the Pāṇḍavas whom he subdues, but all the kings of the earth. Here we finally have a clear and self-conscious reminder of former periods of Muslim imperial hegemony. According to Dandapani, Muttāl Rāvuttan "was ruling in the north, up to the Himalayas, as the Muslims did when they controlled India." As we shall see, the

connection made between Islam and the north provides one of the reasons why Muttāl Rāvuttan becomes the guardian of Draupadī's "northern gate."

C. Muttāl Rāvuttan's Icons

We cannot complete our discussion of Muttāl Rāvuttan, however, without treating the relation between his mythology and his cult within the larger cult of Draupadī. I thus present the ritual fragments that concern him independently of our larger treatment of Draupadī cult ritual: in part because they are structurally marginal to the whole, and in part because our discussion of Muttāl Rāvuttan's mythology—and after his, Pōttu Rāja's—cannot be completed without them.

Let us recall first an unusual, if not unique, feature of the Mēlaccēri Draupadī temple. Muttāl Rāvuttan is worshipped there in two forms: in one he receives vegetarian offerings, in the other nonvegetarian offerings (see map 4). The former are made to an image of Muttāl Rāvuttan the horse-rider (a *rāvuttan*), sculpted in relief on a stone plaque set beside a similar plaque portraying Pōttu Rāja, who also receives vegetarian offerings. These two slabs stand under the entrance to the Pōttu Rāja maṇḍapa and are in the direct line of sight of Draupadī, from the vantage point of her main stone image (*mūlavigraha*) in the temple's inner sanctum. At most Draupadī temples, this position belongs to Pōttu Rāja alone, and nowhere else was Muttāl Rāvuttan found to share it.¹⁹ We may thus infer that the Mēlaccēri temple has provided him with an unusually "purified" form to go along with his more widely recognized impure form. The nonvegetarian offerings are made to an "aniconic" Muttāl Rāvuttan,²⁰ a roughly rectangular slab of rock, daubed with dots of

19. At certain temples he shares it (as Pōrmaṇṇan) with Caṅkuvati, his wife. The only other possible instance met of such sharing of this sacrificial podium was Uttiramērūr. There Muttāl Rāvuttan was said to be present in the *bali-pīṭham*. But this response may have been prompted by my questions, which had noted his absence elsewhere. The structures normally placed in the direct line of the goddess's sight—*bali-pīṭham*, flagstaff, Pōttu Rāja slab, and maṇḍapam—are in fact all quite regularly associated with Pōttu Rāja.

20. I employ the conventional usage here that distinguishes icons proper (images involving a "portrait" representation, whether a statue or painting) from aniconic objects (i.e., ones having no such representation, such as the Śivalingam and the stones under discussion here). Cf. Eschmann's chapter in Eschmann, Kulke, and Tripathi 1978, 77–97; Coccari 1986; Biardeau, in press.

red *kuṇikum*, that stands upright (lengthwise) on a concrete platform in its own separate maṇḍapa, a box-shaped flat-roofed brick and masonry structure with its opening to the east. This maṇḍapa stands away from the goddess's line of sight, to the northeast of her temple's inner sanctum.

These configurations, no matter how exceptional, require our attention on two issues: one, Muttāl Rāvuttan's relation to the "vegetarian" Pōttu Rāja; and the other, the nature of his aniconic representation and his own more regular nonvegetarian ritual fare.

I cannot delve at this point into any of the ritual complexities attendant upon the figure of Pōttu Rāja. But it must be stated that the contrast between him and Muttāl Rāvuttan relies upon their fundamental complementarity, reflected in the myth of Muttāl Rāvuttan's subjugation by Pōrmannan, as well as in other collaborations between them.²¹ In brief, the place of each in the Draupadī cult is defined by differentiated, but complementary, sacrificial functions. If I may state matters summarily, on the face of it the Draupadī cult involves no animal sacrifices. One of Pōttu Rāja's sacrificial functions is thus, in the form of his processional icon, to oversee and receive symbolic offerings that relate to the *Mahābhārata* myth of the "sacrifice of battle." In contrast, Muttāl Rāvuttan has no processional icons that oversee festival ceremonies, and in the only case (at Pātirikuppam) where I heard that he accompanies Pōttu Rāja on such parades, it was, most tellingly, in an "invisible" form. But if Draupadī requires no real sacrifices within the time and space of her festival, she does allow them—and, according to the myth of Muttāl Rāvuttan, actually arranges for them ("life sacrifices: cocks, goats, even humans")—on its temporospatial periphery. The nonvegetarian offerings to Muttāl Rāvuttan are made out of the goddess's line of sight (that is, on her cult's spatial periphery).²² Moreover, they are made at no regular time in her festival, but by arrangement with the pūcāri (as at Tindivanam, where only cocks may be offered during the festival period); or at nonfestival times (as at Tindivanam, Virapāṇṭi and Mēlaccēri: in the latter case only at such times) in the fulfillment of personal

21. On the problematic of the relation between Pōttu Rāja and Muttāl Rāvuttan, see further Hildebeitel, in press.

22. Cf. Whitehead 1921, 91–93 (screens between the sacrifices and the goddesses), 107 (sacrifices beyond the temple walls plus a screen), and 108 (a curtain); also Prabhu 1977, 114.

vows (*pirāṭṭanai*);²³ or after the main ceremonies of the festival are over. Thus at both Pondicherry and Chinna Salem, nonvegetarian offerings are made to Muttāl Rāvuttan̄ six days after firewalking day. Indeed, at Chinna Salem there is an elaborate “offering to the guardians” (*kāval pūjā*), which honors not only Muttāl Rāvuttan̄ (guardian of the northern gate), but Pōrmaṇṇan̄ (guardian of the main eastern gate) and the Kauravas’ sister Turcāttai (Sanskrit Duṣṣālā), who is regarded there as a form of Kālī (guardian of the southern gate; see map 5).²⁴

Yet if the offerings to Muttāl Rāvuttan̄ are set off at Draupadī festivals, they are still part of Draupadī’s cult. And as distinct from the intrafestival mythic deaths that require the supervision of Pōttu Rāja, the offerings to Muttāl Rāvuttan̄ are not mythical or symbolic, but entirely real. At Pondicherry, Muttāl Rāvuttan̄ receives a heap of rice, a nonvegetarian curry (the implicit offering of a goat or chicken), and parched spicy Bengal gram (“a standard item in liquor shops, . . . said to prevent nausea produced by an excessive consumption of alcohol” [Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi 1977a, 548]). At Tindivanam the pūcāri supplied the following list: *ganja* (marijuana), *apiṇ* (opium: “a drug from the Himalayas”), chapattis, che-roots, cigarettes, cocks, hens, goats, and arrack (*carāyam*). The offerings to Muttāl Rāvuttan̄ at the Chinna Salem *kāval pūjā* include roti or chapattis, arrack, cigars, *aṭai* (a thin cake or wafer, “like dosas”), and horse gram (*koḷḷu*) for his horse. At Papanasam, red and green chilies are offered to his dog, the latter curiously painted in Muttāl Rāvuttan̄’s colors with green body and yellow underbelly. Such items were also mentioned at other temples, with the most consistent offerings being liquor and goats. Many of these items are common fare for guardian gods and heroes.²⁵ But in Muttāl Rāvuttan̄’s case, it is to be understood that certain of these things—

23. When I arrived by car during nonfestival season at Virapāṇṭi with a driver, my assistant, and the Tindivanam pūcāri (who came on this trip to help me with my fieldwork, but also to see other Draupadī temples—including Mēlacēri’s—he had heard of but never seen), it was assumed that I had brought a cock to offer to Muttāl Rāvuttan̄.

24. This role for Turcāttai-Duṣṣālā, which I have found nowhere else, appears to be another of the Chinna Salem temple’s unusual features. But at Colāvantan̄ (see chap. 3, n. 20), a different female of the family occupies this southern position: Arjuna’s wife Nākakaṇṇi, the “Serpent Maiden” (Skt. Ulūpī), mother of Aravāṇ (see chap. 10, sec. B, and chap. 15, sec. B).

25. My information on Papanasam comes from Masilamani-Meyer. See Arunachalam 1976, 190; Biardeau 1967–68, 526, on Akkinivīraṇ, Prabhu 1977, 93 (*bhang*, cigarettes, and other narcotics to one Jogipurusha); Kapferer 1983, 137, 147, 229; Coccari 1986; and discussion below on Mailāra-Khaṇḍobā in Karnataka.

meat, chapattis, drugs, liquor, and perhaps Bengal gram—combine to present a caricature of him as a Muslim.²⁶ His iconography makes this clear.

Muttāl Rāvuttan's "icons" are, if anything, more varied than his myths. We have already noted that he is often represented aniconally. Even here there are significantly different shapes: rectangular slabs, as at Mēlaccēri; rounded stones, like lingams, as at Māmaṇṭūr and Mutikai Nallāṅkuppam; square stones, roughly hewn to a point, as at Nallāṇṭipillaipeṛrāl; conical pointed stones that suggest an impalement stake, as at Villupuram. Then there are intriguing cases of elaboration of the basic aniconic form. At one of the two Draupadī temples at Kolar, where the Islamic presence has been especially strong, the stone, at floor level in the outer maṇḍapa, is framed by a painting of a miniature mosque, and the Muttāl Rāvuttan stone within it has become a *dargāh*, or Muslim saint's tomb. At Kovalong, just south of Madras, one finds two Muttāl Rāvuttan stones, each shaped into a short squared column about ten inches high, and topped by a surrounding band surmounted by a tapered point. This is one variation of a shape that Biardeau (in press) has studied in connection with posts found primarily in Andhra that are connected with Pōta Rāju (Pōttu Rāja), and the wider symbolism of the Vedic *yūpa*, the sacrificial stake (see Whitehead 1921, 40 and pl. 4). We shall return to the affinities between Pōttu Rāja and the sacrificial stake, but for the moment it is important to note that Muttāl Rāvuttan is one of the figures, along with Pōttu Rāja, to whom the Draupadī cult imparts some of its symbolism.

The aniconic Muttāl Rāvuttans have various settings. Some are found within the enclosure of an outer maṇḍapa. Some are found in small enclosures (whether roofed or not) within the temple grounds, often—if a temple is so protected—at the base of the outer wall. And some are placed adjacent to properly iconic figures: at Pakkiripālaiyam, for instance, beside a little stone image of Muttāl Rāvuttan's horse; and at other places, near to anthropomorphic images of Muttāl Rāvuttan himself.

It is, however, at the places where Muttāl Rāvuttan is figuratively portrayed that we are able to see the full flowering of his iconography. Although again there is considerable variety, one finds rep-

26. The Draupadī cult appears to tap an implicit regional Hindu folklore, supplemented perhaps by history, of dissipated Muslim rulers (Srinivasachari 1943, 362–63; though cf. *ibid.*, 264: the Maratha Rāja Rām “plied” while at Gingee “with marijuana and opium”).

resentations of two general types. In one, Muttāl Rāvuttan̄ is sculpted in stone and shown by himself, either in the open air or in a three-sided enclosure; in the other, he is sculpted from wood and painted plaster, and is shown surrounded by various human and animal attendants in a true maṇḍapa. The stone images, which can be quite fine (as at Tailāpuram; others are found at Tindivanam, Kiliyanūr, and possibly Villupuram),²⁷ show Muttāl Rāvuttan̄ seated with left leg tucked, right leg forward and overhanging, paunchy belly, mustache, turban, beard, and sword. These features are all repeated in the portrayals of Muttāl Rāvuttan̄ in the larger maṇḍapas. But here, the elaboration is considerable. I have found six Draupadī temples with large Muttāl Rāvuttan̄ maṇḍapas: four along the eastern coastal stretch of the core area (Pondicherry, Ciṇṇapāpucamuttiram, Tiruppātirippuliyūr Railway Station in Cuddalore, and Pātirikkuppam), and two on its western fringes (Vīrapāṇṭi and Chinna Salem). Masilamani-Meyer has kindly sent me slides of two more she has found at Draupadī temples in Thanjavur District (at Papanasam and on the road from Papanasam to Kumbhakonam [henceforth P-K Road]), plus a figure at Cūrakṣōṭṭai which seems to be Muttāl Rāvuttan̄ at a shrine to Aiyaṇar.²⁸

A core area composite of the Muttāl Rāvuttan̄ images would show him with a turban, usually yellow with a flamelike design rising to a point on the top, a red face, eyes bulging and glazed; perhaps golden earrings and a Śaivite *nāmam* mark (Ciṇṇapāpucamuttiram) on his forehead; a green jacket with epaulettes that is cinctured above

27. Local informants at Villupuram, with some amusement, identified the figure beside their conical Muttāl Rāvuttan̄ stone as Rāmānuja. The combination is indeed incongruous. But though statues of Muttāl Rāvuttan̄ are often placed in such combinations, the figure lacks his traits (no turban, weapon, or beard). And with his hands joined in an *aṅjali*, the identification is probably correct. Whitehead (1921, 114–15) relates a story that suggests an explanation for the connection and also recalls features of the mythologies of Muttāl Rāvuttan̄ and Cuṭalai Māṭan̄: when black magicians (who put a paste on their foreheads “made from the head of a first-born child” to make themselves invisible) challenge the ability of Maturai Vīraṇ-Karuppan̄ to protect the treasure of the Aḷakar temple near Madurai, Rāmānuja is consulted for the solution that leads to the magicians’ defeat and death. He thus seems in both cases to represent a devotional and explicitly Vaiṣṇava countercheck to the powers of black magic, something like Śankara’s renown for arresting certain depredations of the goddess (see chap. 11, n. 34; chap. 13, n. 6). There is also a photograph of an unusual Muttāl Rāvuttan̄—naked, ithyphallic, legs splayed, a toddy pot and cup before him, from the “sanctuary of the northern prakāra” at the Kūnicampaṭṭu Draupadī temple, Pondicherry State—on file (no. 7478–11) at the French Indological Institute at Pondicherry.

28. The Cūrakṣōṭṭai figure was called Vīramuṇivar. But he faces Aravāṇ, as Muttāl Rāvuttan̄ does at other Thanjavur District Draupadī temples (Masilamani Meyer, personal communication). He wears a turban and green shawl; his maṇḍapa is dated 1799.

his generously protruding belly; yellow or blue pantaloons; and a sword or dagger in his right hand. At the P-K Road temple he has a green fez with a yellow tassel, but otherwise the two Thanjavur District figures are like those to their north. More revealing, however, are the figures in core area temples who surround Muttāl Rāvuttan. At Pondicherry, Vīrapāṇṭi, and Chinna Salem, male attendants wearing fezzes stand near him holding liquor bottles or squat before toddy vessels. They are there to ply him with alcohol, for which he holds a cup or glass in readiness. At Cuddalore, instead of such attendants, his statue was built to contain a full bottle of brandy, lodged permanently in Muttāl Rāvuttan's stomach. Of the six core area maṇḍapas, only that at Cīṇṇapāpucamuttiram lacks similar evidence of Muttāl Rāvuttan's predilection for alcohol.

Not only his human attendants, however, are of interest. Almost everywhere (the exceptions are at Pondicherry and P-K Road) one finds the horse: either Muttāl Rāvuttan is on or beside it within his maṇḍapa, or there is a clay horse (or horses) standing outside the shrine in readiness for him, like the clay horses one sees throughout rural Tamilnadu outside temples of Aiyānar (see Inglis 1985). The horse is canonically white and is said to be able to fly through the air. At Pondicherry and Vīrapāṇṭi, a parrot is perched on Muttāl Rāvuttan's left hand or arm. But most intriguing are his associations with dogs and with the tiger or lion. These animals sit in attendance at his feet or at the feet of his horse. Either one dog or a pair of dogs is found at all but three (Cīṇṇapāpucamuttiram, Vīrapāṇṭi, P-K Road) of the eight large maṇḍapas, while the tiger joins him at Pondicherry and the lion at Cīṇṇapāpucamuttiram. It is thus at Pondicherry that one has the most complete ensemble (minus the horse): liquor bearers, parrot, dogs, and tiger (see plate 8).

To appreciate the significance of these iconographic tableaux, we need now to observe one essentially consistent fact. Muttāl Rāvuttan may be represented as a simple stone, as the main figure of an elaborate grouping in a maṇḍapa, or by some combination of the two (as at Vīrapāṇṭi and Cīṇṇapāpucamuttiram, where an-
iconic stones are set in front of the icons). But whatever the case, he is regularly situated in one position: to the northeast of the inner sanctum, and in the ideal case (e.g., at Tindivanam, Pakkiri-pālayam, Nallānpillai-per-rāl) directly to the north of Pōttu Rāja.²⁹ It is a multivalent symbolism.

29. I have found only two exceptions. One is at the north-facing temple at Mutikai Nallānkuppam, where by axial rotation Muttāl Rāvuttan remains still in the same position relative to Draupadī in the garbhagṛha: that is, to her left, out of her line of vision. And the other is at Pondicherry, where perhaps because of spatial limitations on the temple's north side, the Muttāl Rāvuttan maṇḍapa is to Draupadī's south and right.

First of all, as Biardeau has observed, the northeast is "the habitual position of the *kṣetrapāla*," the "guardian of the field" (in press; cf. Gopinatha Rao 1971, 2: 495). The *Kṣetrapāla* as a pan-Hindu deity of Vedic pedigree, found in Coorg in a distinctly toddy-loving aspect, has been discussed by Srinivas (1965, 179, 223–24). But it is the *Kṣetrapāla* *Khaṇḍobā* of Maharashtra and Karnataka who brings us closest to *Muttāl Rāvuttaṇ*. We have already seen certain affinities between them. Both gods are *kulasvāmīs* or *kula-devatas* for certain lineages of various castes, especially those with *Kṣatriya* or royal claims or aspirations.³⁰ Both are linked with Islam. In *Muttāl Rāvuttaṇ*'s case, insofar as his *Kṣetrapāla* position places him to the north, he is said to guard the "field" of the Draupadī temple from northern Islamic incursions.³¹ And at several places, it is insisted that Muslims are among those who sometimes make offerings to him. Both gods ride horses. Both have double aniconic and iconic forms. *Khaṇḍobā* is represented in his avatar form as a horse rider and in various folk and conventional lingam forms: as a single *svayambhū* lingam, a rocky hump of rounded stone; by two such stones, the second representing his first wife *Mhālsā*; or by a lingam set in a yoni (Sontheimer, personal communication; cf. Stanley 1977, 32). And each is theologically characterized by association with Śiva (cf. n. 33 below on *Bhairava*). *Khaṇḍobā*, through an extensive system of correlations between his cult and Śiva's, is regarded as Śiva's *avatāra* (Sontheimer 1978, 112; 1984, 155, 159–69; 1985; Stanley 1977, 31–32; 1984a). And *Muttāl Rāvuttaṇ* is more than an ardent Śivabhakta who may wear the Śaivite *nāmam* on his forehead and be represented by lingamlike stones. The northeast position (*īcāṇīya*) that he occupies as *Kṣetrapāla* is distinguished among the eight directions as the region of Śiva as *Īśāna* (see Diehl 1956, 61).

30. *Khaṇḍobā* is worshipped by the Holkars of Indore (Sontheimer 1984, 163); as to the Marathas, Sontheimer (personal communication) remarks: "The frame of reference was rather to be a king, and a Marāthā. It has been rather a 'Marathization' than a 'Kṣatriyization' in Maharashtra." *Muttāl Rāvuttaṇ*'s devotees are primarily *Vaṇṇiyars*, though I was repeatedly told that people come to worship *Muttāl Rāvuttaṇ* from all the communities that are involved in the Draupadī cult. *Virapāṇṭi* is said to draw *Ceṭṭiyārs* from as far as Salem and Pudukottai.

31. Forts set to the north of South Indian kingdoms to protect against Islamic incursions are a historical reality (see Satyanatha Aiyar [1924] 1980, 113, 120). The Vijayanagar capital at Hampi itself probably had such a rationale behind its location. It is also possible that Gingee, as the northernmost of the three Tamil Nayakates, suffered most for its exposed northern position.

What links Khaṇḍobā and Muttāl Rāvuttan most decisively is their mutual association with the dog and the tiger. Draupadī cult informants are rather mute on Muttāl Rāvuttan's connection with these animals (the dogs have been described as his hunting companions; the tiger, or lion, as representing his strength or fierceness). But their significance in the Khaṇḍobā cult has been well documented. Khaṇḍobā has a special class of male devotees whose worship consists in imitating the dog: thus on special festival occasions they bark, crawl on hands and knees, and eat from a begging bowl in doglike fashion (Sontheimer 1978, 116; 1981, 6–7; 1984, 165; Stanley 1977, 32). These devotees are called *vāghyās* in Marathi and *vaggayyas* in Kannada, a name that according to Sontheimer (1984, 166) "is invariably derived from Sanskrit *vyāghra*," that is, "tiger." Though they exhibit no explicit tiger behavior, their principal marker is a "tiger skin" pouch, made either of actual tiger skin or of deer or goat skin ritually transformed into tiger skin (ibid., 166; see also Stanley 1984b, 5), from which they dispense turmeric powder (*bhaṇḍār*). One myth that accounts for the origin of these "tiger-dogs" is the following: "It is said the *vāgyās* were tigers formerly, but having the *darśan* of Mārtaṇḍa [a name for Khaṇḍobā] their body became human. They were told by Mārtaṇḍa/Bhairava to bark like dogs" (Sontheimer 1984, 166; cf. Sontheimer 1981, n. 22; Stanley 1977, 32). Let us recall that behind Muttāl Rāvuttan lies the capacity of the mantravādi to transform himself into different animals. In this regard, it is noteworthy that at least in Karnataka *vāghyās* are like mantravādīs in that they are known to practice black magic "with which they try to intimidate people and extract money" (Sontheimer 1981).³²

Now as Sontheimer has ably argued, "the mixing of 'tiger' and 'dog' is chronic in myth, ritual and folk art" (1985, 13; cf. 1984, 166). As examples of gods associated with both animals, he cites two: Śiva (who is connected with dogs as early as the *Śatarudrīya* hymn of the Brāhmaṇa literature, and who sits on a tiger skin and is worshipped as Vaghobā, "Father Tiger," in a Maharashtrian cult), and the exemplary Kṣetrapāla Bhairava, who is regularly connected with the dog, but whose mounts, or *vāhanas*, "are occasionally the

32. Cf. Sontheimer, in press, 12–13, and Coccari 1986, on links between exorcist magicians (*ojhās*, etc.) and the guardian Bīr Bābās around Banaras. The *vāghyās'* black garment (Sontheimer 1981, 8) may also find a counterpart in the dark blue kurta worn by Muttāl Rāvuttan in the Terukkūttu drama.

dog and the tiger or two animals who are a mixture of both" (1984, 166; 1981, 6).³³ To this list, we may now add Muttāl Rāvuttan.³⁴

This tiger-dog (or alternatively, lion-dog)³⁵ combination would seem to express a concern with themes of possession and the handling of impurity. While the *vāghyas* may only be offered milk and "pure" vegetarian food during current rituals, "they will fight like dogs trying to tear away food from each other's mouth" (Sontheimer 1981, 6); and Khaṇḍobā's dog may be represented iconographically as tasting the flesh and blood of one of Khaṇḍobā's demon foes (Sontheimer 1984, 164–65 and pl. 2). In fact, in the Khaṇḍobā cult, the horse is also linked with possession: "During Dasarā at Devaraguḍḍa [Karnataka] the devotees gallop like horses whipping themselves with horsewhips, . . . and even at the Somvati Amāvasyā festival in Jejuri one may see devotees possessed by the power of the god moving similarly like horses in front of the palanquin" (Sontheimer 1978, 116).

Now as Stanley indicates, in Maharashtra a theological opposition is maintained between the *sakāma bhakti* ("devotion with desire") of the Khaṇḍobā cult and the *niṣkāma bhakti* ("desireless devotion") of Vaiṣṇava sectarian traditions. It is clear that this contrast is maintained at least in part to disparage *sakāma bhakti* for its links with "demon" (*bhūt*) worship, possession, and vows of self-endangerment and even self-mutilation.³⁶ Moreover, the opposition is upheld not only by followers of the "purer" Vaiṣṇava cults, but by devotees of Khaṇḍobā (Stanley 1984a, 1). This is an important point, for although sectarian traditions may maintain an ideological distance from the phenomena just described, in the larger context of *bhakti* Hinduism, in which both the sects and folk cults

33. On Bhairava as Kṣetrapāla, his connections with dogs, his iconography, his links with Śiva as beheader and holder of the fifth head of Brahmā, see especially E.-C. Visuvalingam, in press, and 1985b; cf. also Sontheimer 1978, 112; Sewell 1882, xv, xviii–xxi, xxiii, xxv, xxvii; Andhra Bhairavas (as identified by Brahman informants), generally with upraised trident and the lower of four hands holding "a human head which a dog jumps at to bite it" (p. xv) or to catch its blood as it falls to the ground; Kramrisch 1981a, 31–38; Eck 1982, 189–97 and passim; Gopinatha Rao 1971, 2: 495–98; Shastri [1916] 1974, 161; and Adiceam 1965, 25–44.

34. It is likely that as more is known about the iconography of the Kṣetrapālas and other guardian gods of folk Hinduism, other names can be added to the list.

35. On the tiger and lion as symbolic alternates, in particular as *vāhanas* of the goddess, see Hildebeitel 1978, 777–89.

36. E.g., "diving recklessly under the hooves of a horse to catch before it falls to the ground some of the dirt the horse has stepped on" (Stanley 1984a, 9). Hook swinging and firewalking were once also common at Jejuri (idem 1977, 32). On "suicidal" and other harsh devotional acts to Mailāra (a Kannaḍa name for Khaṇḍobā) in the medieval period, cf. Sontheimer 1978, 116; 1981, 20 and n. 68.

find their places, alternate modes of bhakti such as these can be complementary. In light of our study, it is instructive to look to the *Mahābhārata* for an analogous complementarity. Among the five Pāṇḍavas, the robust Bhīma, Draupadī's ever-solicitous protector, is the main exponent of the values of *kāma* (see Biardeau 1976, 235–36; 1981d, 78–79) and may be regarded as the epic representative of impure sakāma bhakti. In contrast, the more refined and distant Arjuna, as hearer of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, is unequivocally the representative of pure niṣkāma bhakti. Now Bhīma is frequently identified with the lion and tiger, and also carries the standard epithet “Wolf-belly” (*vr̥kodara*),³⁷ the wolf being the wild predatory counterpart to the domesticated, scavenging dog. Indeed, the dogs who attend the Muttāl Rāvuttaṇ icon at Chinna Salem are unmistakably vulpine. One thus finds symbolic representation of the same bhakti complementarity in the *Mahābhārata* as one finds in Maharashtrian evaluations of the cult of Khaṇḍobā.

In the Draupadī cult, which provides an all-inclusive bhakti framework, it is clear that there are two analogous poles of bhakti, and that while Draupadī's devotion to Kṛṣṇa represents bhakti at its most sublime, it is counterpoised by numerous expressions of inferior bhakti (see chap. 11), among which that of Muttāl Rāvuttaṇ is perhaps the most extreme. The important thing is that this inferior bhakti has itself two potentials: it can be transformed into higher bhakti, or it can take on perverse forms linked with drunkenness, animalistic behavior, and the demonic. It is a ritual function of Muttāl Rāvuttaṇ, the Muslim convert, to stand at the boundary between these two potentials. On the one hand, he is surrounded with animals that evoke violence, impurity, magic, and possession; he has attendants who ply him with liquor; and he has devotees who offer him marijuana and opium. In this connection, it is to be noted that in Karnataka, Mailāra-Khaṇḍobā is (like Śiva) also supposed to smoke marijuana: at Devarugudḍa a *hukku* is kept beside his palanquin (Sontheimer 1981, 12). As we shall see, in Draupadī

37. See especially *Mbh.* 1.114.11–13: At Wolf-belly's (the passage uses only this name) Himalayan birth, his mother, Kuntī, dropped him from her lap because she was frightened by a tiger; but his body, hard as a diamond, shattered the mountain where he fell (cf. Biardeau 1976, 231–36: the tiger may evoke Bhīma's connection with the goddess). Cf. *Vāmana Purāṇa* 21.19: the Bhūtas born from the goddess's laughter to join her in battle against Mahiṣāsura are led by “some with terrible tiger faces [*vyāghramukhā raudrā*], others having the shape of wolves [*vr̥kākārās*].” Bhīma's affinity with the wolf points toward his drinking of Duḥśāsana's blood; see chap. 18, sec. A). He also has the lion as his flag emblem (see, e.g., *Mbh.* 6.45.33; cf. Biardeau CR 87, 153).

38. On the implications of this ritual rapport, see further Hildebeitel, in press.

cult contexts, drunkenness and narcotics are frequently referred to as impure, or "polluted," counterparts to possession. They are essentially demonic and stand in opposition to the higher forms of possession that become vehicles for bhakti.

Yet Muttāl Rāvuttan̄ does more than simply indulge himself in such pastimes. To be sure, he is believed to partake of what he is offered. But he is said to neutralize the offerings' dangerous effects, so that when they are returned as prasādam, they have lost their heating or intoxicating qualities. We must thus understand that when liquor, drugs, and various hot foods are offered to the little stones that represent Muttāl Rāvuttan̄, he detoxifies them so that the offerers (or sometimes the pūcāri) can consume them unaffected. This is Muttāl Rāvuttan̄'s service. Like other "criminal gods" and "demon devotees" who are "converted" to the worship of the goddess, he retains facets of his "former" character, placing those traits at the service of higher expressions of bhakti. Indeed, this is seen in the one case I have found where Muttāl Rāvuttan̄ is ritually personified during a Draupadī festival. At Mutikai Nallānkuppam, a Vaṇṇiyar man acts as Muttāl Rāvuttan̄ during the dangerous revival rites on the culminating day of the festival: wearing a yellow dhoti and a tightly wrapped yellow turban, he continually strikes his head against a Draupadī temple wall; only after the revivals does the pāratīyār come to awaken him from his possession. His head does not bleed, a sign of the goddess's protection (cf. Obeyesekere 1984, 600–602). More interesting still, the two rites' simultaneity suggests that Muttāl Rāvuttan̄'s possession neutralizes, not only his own pain, but the pain of those who undergo the death and revival rites.

It is instructive to close our discussion of Draupadī's Muslim devotee by observing that his neutralizing function has, of all things, a Vedic pedigree. In the Vedic animal sacrifice, the northeast is associated with the Śamitr̥, the "appeaser" priest (from the root *śam-*, "to appease," "to pacify") who is responsible for killing the sacrificial animal by suffocation or strangulation (means that are "appeasing" and that supposedly minimize pain by avoiding bloodshed). It is to the northeast of the *mahāvedi*, the additional "great altar" required for animal sacrifices, that one finds the *śām itra*, the Śamitr̥'s fire (and sometimes a shed) on which he roasts the limbs of the victim after cutting them (Sen 1978, 110–11 and plans 3 and 5). Here we can only note that there are reasons to suspect that the Śamitr̥ also has a rapport with Śiva, for both are structurally necessary "outsiders" to the Vedic rite, "outsiders" who supply the means of sacrificial death yet "appease" its dan-

gerous impurity (see Hildebeitel 1976a, 320–24; 1980c, 173; Scheuer 1982, 286). One may suspect that the identification of Śiva as Īśāna with the northeast is connected with both the Śāmitra and the Kṣetrapāla. Let us also observe that the Śāmitr's fire is distinct from the sacrificial post (the *yūpa*), which is set at the eastern end of the mahāvedi. In this regard, the *yūpa* corresponds to the typical position occupied by the temple flagstaff, which is normally (see n. 19 above) connected in Draupadī temples, not with Muttāl Rāvuttaṇ, but with his cohort Pōttu Rāja.³⁸

It is important to note that such continuities take place within the framework of the traditional Vedic sacrifice as it is conserved, yet transformed, through the medium of popular bhakti Hinduism. Moreover, the Kṣetrapāla with his "habitual position" to the northeast shares this precise location and its Vedic model with a related figure in Brahmanical temples. This is the Nirmālyadevatā, the deity—often a lower form of the temple's main deity (Caṇḍa for Śiva, Viṣvaksena for Viṣṇu)—who receives the "residue of offerings" (*nirmālya*) to the main deity, guards it from violation, and handles its dangerous impurity (Gupta 1976, 80–85; Brunner 1969, 229–31). I have not found Muttāl Rāvuttaṇ actually receiving Draupadī's *nirmālya*. But the offerings he does receive are in effect the *nirmālya* from the violent aspects of her mythology.

The continuities, however, are not only historical. Equally significant are the structural and thematic affinities. The Kṣetrapāla, Nirmālyadevatā, and Śāmitr—with Śiva as the most prominent linking figure between them—perform the necessary outsider role of guarding the purity of the sacrifice for the gods and goddesses who receive its shares. They "appease" or neutralize the extreme forms of sacrificial violence and impurity. Muttāl Rāvuttaṇ's case is among the most interesting in this regard because of his Muslim identity. It is as a Muslim that he has been "converted" to the role of guarding the cult of Draupadī, and he neutralizes various hot, violent, and impure things that the folk Hinduism of the Draupadī cult associates, among other things, with Islam itself. Let us recall that just as Draupadī protects the northern boundary of the capital of Gingee from "the dangers of the north," so Muttāl Rāvuttaṇ protects Draupadī by neutralizing the foremost of those dangers through his own conversion. And he does so from his position to the goddess's north, or more exactly, to her northeast: the position that allows him to be the "guardian of the field" of the goddess who protects the kingdom.

38. On the implications of this ritual rapport, see further Hildebeitel, in press.

II

To Kurukṣetra

7

The Draupadī Cult's *Mahābhārata*: An Introduction

Already we have picked up several times the threads that lead us from the first to the second part of this book, for the Draupadī cult and the history and mythology of the kingdom of Gingee are woven of the same cloth as the *Mahābhārata*. Within the cult, Gingee is the regional symbol for a process, worked out in narrative, dramatic, and ritual modes, whereby the *Mahābhārata* is transposed into local, and for the most part village, South Indian traditions. Our task now is to familiarize ourselves with this "transposed" *Mahābhārata*, the *Mahābhārata* of the Draupadī cult. We thus move from Gingee to the ancient North Indian epic sites: Hāstinapura; capital of the Kauravas; Indraprastha, capital of the Pāṇḍavas; and above all the battlefield of Kurukṣetra where the two armies finally meet for their decisive eighteen-day war. But as we move now from Gingee to Kurukṣetra, we have also followed up to this point a reverse mythic movement from Kurukṣetra to Gingee. Throughout this book, each remains a symbol in a reversible process of transposition.

Given this fluid, folk situation, of course, any attempt to grasp and present this cultic *Mahābhārata* requires certain scholarly gambits. I try to keep the fluidity in sight at all times, but it must be admitted that in singling out the cult's epic mythology for discussion in this volume, and reserving discussion of its *Mahābhārata* rituals for a second volume, the full flow has been temporarily and somewhat artificially divided. Nonetheless, the myths do stand up to their own treatment. The subject of the folk mythology—and, of course, ritual—of a regional *Mahābhārata* cult has its own intrinsic interest, and indeed its comparative interest in the wider Indian context. From what is known from other parts of India, the Draupadī cult's "folk" treatment of the epic follows certain pan-Indian patterns. The closest known similarities occur in cults from the

Himalayan foothills of the Garhwal region of Uttar Pradesh in North India, in Nepal, and in northern Andhra.¹

As far as my present knowledge allows, the only place where the *Mahābhārata* has been subject to so intense and thorough a regional folk interpretation as it has in the Gingeer core area is in Garhwal. Reports on the Garhwal cult are at this point preliminary. But there are signs that when a fuller study is available, astonishing parallels and significant variations will be apparent in the ways these two cults mythologize and ritualize the epic: one in the high mountains of India's far north, the other in the lowlands of the deep south, and with nothing to link them geographically or historically but Hinduism. The Garhwal cult centers on the Pāṇḍav Līlā, a series of ritual dramas sponsored by dominant caste Rajputs or Kṣatriyas who claim descent from the Pāṇḍavas and regard their region as one in which certain epic events—the Pāṇḍavas' births, their Himalayan ascent to heaven—took place. The Pāṇḍavas are regarded as "personal deities" (*iṣṭadevatās*), but the Pāṇḍav Līlā is also "the equivalent of a *candī puja* or worship of the fierce Candi form of Kali," since Draupadī is regarded as an incarnation (avatar) of Kālī (Sax 1986, 6). The līlās enact selected epic scenes, include a mix of bardic recitation and dance-drama performance, induce possession by both actors and audience, and occur in the "dark months" from November to January. These months are associated with worship of Śiva (who, according to one bardic performer, "became the five Pāṇḍavas, and they returned to him") and also with "animal sacrifices, exorcism, and the worship of inauspicious beings" (*ibid.*, 3, 23). Sacrificial themes are especially prominent where the classical epic story is reshaped or opened up to admit new episodes and persona: A hunt by Bhīma and Arjuna to obtain rhinoceros hide for the funerary rites of their father, Pāṇḍu, culminates in the sacrifice of a live goat or a pumpkin dressed up like a rhinoceros (3, 11). The drama on the epic episode of the Aśva-medha (horse sacrifice), which ideally provides the climax to a

1. There is clearly also an important regional folklore in the Kurukṣetra area (see Cunningham 1970, 86–106), but it is not clear whether it is linked to any analogous cult. However, Victoria Urubshurov informs me of research by herself, Michael Mahar, and T. R. Singh into the practices of an exorcist-healer from near Meerut who combats ailments by invoking the heroes and even entire forces of the *Mahābhārata* war to reenact its battle for the benefit of his patients. Cf. also Coccari 1986, 19: "Many of the Banaras *bīr* [the exorcist-healers' hero spirit-familiars] were said to have died at the time of the *Mahābhārata* war." One should also mention the relation between the *Mahābhārata* and certain regional folk epics and hero cults (see Beck 1982; Roghair 1982; Schomer 1984), which will be examined in volume 2 (see already Hillebeitel 1984b).

Pāṇḍav Līlā, emphasizes the obstacles the Pāṇḍavas must overcome to obtain a suitable black horse for the sacrifice (12). But most intriguing is the centrality given to the līlā in which the Pāṇḍavas hide their weapons in the śamī tree before undertaking their year in disguise. The tree (a pine, as substitute) is uprooted, limbed by Bhīma's club, is present at at least one other līlā (the culminating Aśvamedha), and is finally buried at a water source with the Pāṇḍavas' weapons at a festival's end (8–12). Meanwhile, the tree itself has, if I may hazard a guess, a double in a new epic character, the Pāṇḍavas' companion, a low-caste ironsmith (Lohār) named Kaliya Lohār. Sax tells me that Kaliya Lohār is a deity in his own right (created by Brahmā at the beginning of the universe, and living on into the Kali Yuga) who makes the Pāṇḍavas' new weapons and polishes their old ones. My treatment of Draupadī's Gingee mythology has already supplied enough information to suggest that such a combination—śamī tree, the presence (suggestive of the sacrificial stake) of the substitute tree at the enactment of the epic horse sacrifice, and companion hero of low caste who supplies the Pāṇḍavas' weapons—might provide a parallel to the complex surrounding Pōttu Rāja. The mythology of Pōrmaṇṇan will only provide further reasons to entertain such a suspicion. Moreover, what is the need for a śamī tree at a horse sacrifice? To my knowledge, no śamī tree is required at the classical Aśvamedha. Rather, it looks like an importation into this horse sacrifice of the symbolism of the śamīpūjā, an indispensable element of the royal buffalo sacrifice. In the same vein, why is the horse black? In the Vedic ritual, the horse should be three colored or two colored, in the latter case black and white (Dumont 1927, xii, 22–23, 249–50, 357): a requirement known to the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* (14.72.7), which identifies the Pāṇḍavas' Aśvamedha horse as *kṛṣṇasāra*, "chiefly black, black and white [as the eye]." The Garhwal horse's different color is no doubt that of the buffalo. Indeed, according to Berreman (1972, 101–4) the Garhwal Pāṇḍava-Draupadī cult sometimes involves actual buffalo sacrifices.

Less regionally intensive than this Garhwali cult, but still quite revealing for other parallels, is the identification among Newars in Nepal of Draupadī with Bhairavī and of Bhīma with Bhairava. In certain temples, Bhīma-Bhairava's wrath is averted by placing images of him and Draupadī next to the "benign and gentle Arjuna." On his feast day, Bhīma is offered "innumerable buffaloes, goats, ducks, and chickens," while Arjuna receives eggs, coins, and vegetarian fare "in accordance with ancient Vedic worship" (Anderson 1971, 237; cf. Visuvalingam 1985b; cf. also chaps. 6, 18, 19).

Finally, one would love to know more about the traditions that Thurston and Rangachari (1904, 3: 349–56) discuss in connection with the Konda Doras and Konda Reddis, apparently related subgroups of a caste of hill cultivators on the slopes of the Eastern Ghats of northern Andhra (Vizagapatam and Godavari Districts). The language of the Konda Doras is said to link them with the Kondhs. They “worship the Pāṇḍavas and a goddess called Talupulamma,” and give “Pāṇḍavakulam (or Pāṇḍava caste)” as a caste title (*ibid.*, 351). But most interesting is Thurston’s information on the Konda Reddis:

They profess to be both Saivites and Vaisnavites . . . ; and yet they worship the Pāṇḍavas, the spirits of the hills, . . . their ancestors including women who have died before their husbands, and the deity Muthyāamma and her brother Pōturāzu, Sāralamma, and Unamalamma. . . . The shrine of Sāralamma of Pedakonda, eight miles east of Rēkapalle, is a place of pilgrimage, and so is Bison Hill [Pāpikonda], where an important Reddi festival is held every seven or eight years in honor of the Pāṇḍava brothers, and a huge fat pig, fattened for the occasion, is killed and eaten. (*Ibid.*, 355)

As far as I can tell, these practices have no connection with the largely Tamil Draupadī cult, whose reaches into Andhra extend only up to its southernmost districts (see chap. 2). Indeed, Thurston makes no mention here of Draupadī at all, though it is hard to imagine her being totally forgotten.² But other elements are only too familiar: worship of the Pāṇḍavas, Pōta Rāju (linked not with Draupadī but another goddess), and a pig sacrifice on “Bison Hill” (the name, however, is apparently an English coinage).³ The report does not indicate how, or even whether, these elements form a coherent ensemble, and in particular whether Pōta Rāju is linked with the Pāṇḍavas or their cult. It is possible their connections are negligible or unstable, for in what appears to be another variation on the same regional configuration, Gadabas in East Godavari Dis-

2. Andhra has a rich *Mahābhārata* folklore in which Draupadī figures highly; see Rama Raju 1982, and below, chap. 11.

3. The pig sacrifice is prominent especially in the cult of *Aṅkāḷammaṇ* (see Meyer 1984, 140, 237; Whitehead 1921, 94). Cf. also Whitehead, 1921, 53, 59–60, and above, chap. 4, n. 4, on mythologies of the boar. The sacrificial theme is also submerged in the episode of the killing the boar Mūka in “Arjuna’s Tapas” (see chap. 12).

The Pāpi Kondalu (“Hills”) cannot mean “Bison.” The name “Bison Hills” is English, and may derive from the hills’ shape (personal communication, Velcheru Narayana Rao).

trict have a quite conventional cult for Pōta Rāju. His worship is linked with buffalo sacrifices to their village goddesses, while the five Pāṇḍavas are regarded as forest deities who possess *patis*, or female mediums (Eisenhauer 1985, 10–11, 30, 59, and cf. above n. 1). But one may still suspect that the Draupadī cult has at the least shaped its *Mahābhārata* by drawing such elements as these together.

We have met similar elements in our discussion of Draupadī's second advent to Gingee, and we shall meet them all again in the Draupadī cult's mythology of Kurukṣetra, most notably in regard to Pōttu Rāja and numerous mythic evocations of the buffalo sacrifice. These convergences further widen the scope of our inquiry into other topics with which the Draupadī cult intertwines the mythologies of local "village" goddesses, the Hindu mythology of the goddess in its greatest extent, and the *Mahābhārata*. Let me here reiterate a hypothesis that I have begun to investigate in several short studies of the Sanskrit epic: despite the fact that the classical *Mahābhārata* makes little direct reference to the goddess, the epic narrative would seem to be informed by the goddess's mythology (see Hildebeitel 1980b, 1980c, 1981, 1984a). If this is so, it means that a folk interpretation of the *Mahābhārata* that places the goddess at its center has every chance of revealing much to us about the classical epic itself. And that is what the South Indian Draupadī cult's *Mahābhārata* is: an adroit and compelling multileveled interpretation of a living *Mahābhārata*.

A. Three Levels of Performance: Piracaṅkam, Kūttu, and Ritual Enactment

It must be admitted, however, that the notion of a Draupadī cult *Mahābhārata* is a heuristic construct. No such monolithic entity really exists. At one and the same festival, there will usually be three performative modes through which the *Mahābhārata* is presented: Piracaṅkam or Pārata Piracaṅkam, "recitation" of the epic in Tamil by a pāratiyār (or *pārata-piracaṅki*, that is, "a *Mahābhārata* reciter"); Terukkūttu, or "street drama"; and local ritual enactment. Together they provide a triangulated festival concordance.

As is already clear from chapters 5 and 6, the first two media not only present the epic material very differently, but the material they present can vary greatly in content. The differences are intensified when we turn to the narrative implications of the local rituals. Beyond this, every local temple has its own way of performing its ritual cycle, and every pāratiyār and every Kūttu troupe

presents the epic with idiosyncratic twists. As distinct from those involved in the rituals of a local festival-sponsoring temple, the pāratyārs and Kūttu performers are professional itinerants, hired by reputation, and almost invariably imported from outside the local communities in which they perform. There is an evident tendency for local temples to seek new faces and circulate the talent, and local communities frequently hire different performers from one festival to the next. When the talent is prestigious and the narratives and dramas go well, the festival is of course enhanced. But the possibilities for different combinations of *Mahābhārata* presentation and interpretation are thus virtually infinite.

In order to delimit the subject, I will thus address myself primarily to the *Mahābhārata* of the two classes of itinerant professionals. Only in two cases will I go beyond their performance repertoire to emphasize the narrative implications of the ritual cycle. First, in chapter 8, I will discuss a particular epic episode often singled out for local ritual enactment. And second, I will conclude my study with a discussion of the *Mahābhārata* mythology—clearly ritually inspired—of Draupadī's firewalk. Except where certain dramas build directly upon ritual themes or incorporate their own ritual elements, I will defer discussion of the *Mahābhārata* mythology of specific Draupadī cult rituals to volume 2. Let me note, however, that it is no accident that the ritual cycle provides certain boundaries to the overall narrative continuum in which the *Mahābhārata* is presented. Piracāṅkam and Kūttu are both framed within the festival's overarching ritual medium. Moreover, the pāratyārs and dramatists often play major roles in local temple rituals, and they are usually the best sources on ritual connections with the *Mahābhārata* mythos. Local temple personnel often defer to them (especially to the pāratyārs), and readily admit that in contrast to the professionals' expertise, their own knowledge of the epic is more limited, uncertain, and even confused.

Let me first attempt to clarify the relation between Piracāṅkam and Kūttu, and to indicate the manner in which I will seek to distill their enormous double performance repertoire into manageable "epic proportions." In what follows, I am fortunate to be able to avail myself of Frasca's pioneering study (1984) of the Terukkūttu, which takes such matters well into account. It is especially on the technical matters of performance that his work is most definitive. I will thus summarize certain of his findings that bear on the relation between the two performance genres.

Piracāṅkam has a classical model in the Kathākālākṣepam (Sanskrit "passing time through story"), a style of recitation performed in both Tamil and Sanskrit in ritual contexts at large Tamil temples.

In effect, Piracāṅkam is Kathākālakṣepam's "little tradition" counterpart. The two use different modes of musical accompaniment. A pāratīyār plays no instrument himself. He recites from an open book set before him and is accompanied by a harmonium (*ciruti-petṭi*) player who travels with him (see plate 5). In contrast, "the Kathākālakṣepam is almost always accompanied rhythmically by the classical drum called the Mrdangam while the reciter himself will play small finger cymbals as he is singing." But both styles involve a "musical narrative amalgamation of song (*pāṭṭu*), musical chant and exegetical prose" (Frasca 1984, 143). At Draupadī festivals, Piracāṅkam is performed in the daytime while Terukkūttu is performed at night. As Frasca sees it, the latter is a ritual "theatre of possession." Its nighttime setting and many of its components—musical accompaniment, makeup, curtain entrances, song, dance—contribute to its power to bring about this effect. As I will return to these dimensions of the Terukkūttu frequently, I need not elaborate on them here, other than to say that Frasca's treatment of them is most stimulating.

Yet insofar as his study has also led him into the area of the Draupadī cult's treatment of the *Mahābhārata*, it will be important to indicate certain points where our information and conclusions differ. In this regard, I clearly disagree with Frasca's statement that Piracāṅkam and Kūttu "deal with exactly the same story repertoire, the Villi *Pāratam*."⁴ True, Villi provides the skein that both genres follow, and some of the most regularly performed dramas are either named after his *paruvans* (*parvans*) or *carukkams* (*sargams*) (roughly, "book" and "section" titles) or define their narrative contents and episode-span in relationship to them. But it is hardly the case that the two genres "deal with exactly the same story repertoire." As we have seen in chapters 5 and 6, they often differ drastically.

To this point, my initial efforts to define the differences have stressed a sociological partition between the two cycles: the Piracāṅkam linked to the more "classicist" and antiquarian interests of its performers, and the Kūttu more oriented toward "popular" themes and tastes. In part, this sociological distinction involves two different attitudes toward "the book." Pāratīyārs are by definition text-oriented, and their prestige is defined by their command over authoritative texts. For their Pārata Piracāṅkam within the Draupadī cult, the key text is usually Villi, but sometimes the *Nal-lāppillai Mahābhārata* is recited from as well. Brameesa Mudaliyar

4. (1984, 145). In brief, Frasca generalizes on the basis of what he regards to be the "typical" cycle of one Pāratam festival, that of Iruṅkal (*ibid.*, 282; see also map 2 and table 6). Granted that this temple's festival is typical, it does not always serve well as the basis for generalizations.

used both of these works in his Piracaṅkam, and he also gave Piracaṅkam on Śaivite texts at Śiva temples. But his main specialization was in Nallāppillai (see plate 5). With such focus comes the pāratiyārs' concern to guard the text, and thus (within the Draupadī cult) their versions of the *Mahābhārata*, from cult-based folkloric intrusions. In two decisive cases already discussed, we have seen the pāratiyārs exclude Pōttu Rāja and Muttāl Rāvuttan from the epic and accord them alternate postepic mythologies. In contrast, the Terukkūttu shows no restraints in "epicizing" these figures. Though the dramatists know of Villi, it is doubtful that they ever consult, and unlikely that many of them could consult, his *Pāratam*. Though some of their plays have surely been composed with Villi in mind, they are passed on in a milieu where "the book" recedes from view. As we shall see, the Kūttu has its own literature, but it is one with absolutely no classical or authoritative prestige.

Not surprisingly, such distinctions are linked to caste. Of the seven pāratiyārs whose caste I identified through interviews (see chap. 5, n. 11), two were Śaivite Aiyar Brahmans, two Vēlāḷar Mutaliyārs, one a Kōṇār, one a Vaṇṇiyar, and one a Nāṭār. In terms of caste ranking, there is considerable range here, but it begins from near the top and shows what may be called a Brahmanical vector, with Vēlāḷars especially disposed in that direction (Brameesa Mudaliyar, like many Vēlāḷars, was a vegetarian, and even proclaimed that he was stricter in observance than the Brahmans). Such a vector can also be marked in the book-oriented classicism of the pāratiyār profession.

Among Terukkūttu actors, on the other hand, the castes involved rank in a much lower range and show if anything a possibly reversed vector. Frasca indicates that four castes are most prominent. Vaṇṇiyars predominate in southern parts of our core area; this would cover the Pakkiripālaiyam troupe, whose two leaders are Vaṇṇiyars, as are nearly all the members of their ensemble. In the northern parts, the actors are mostly Tampirāṇs (a subgroup of the Paṇṭārams, non-Brahman temple priests) and Vaṇṇārs (washer-men). Paṇṭārams (Untouchables) perform within their own communities.⁵ One notes the absence of Brahmans and Vēlāḷars.⁶ To

5. Frasca 1984, 31–42; he also mentions Kuṛavars as a fifth caste, but the evidence—their connection through fortunetelling with the drama genre called Kuṛavañci (see below, chap. 13, sec. C)—does not establish a true link with acting. There may also be Paṇṭārams pāratiyārs similarly restricted to their own communities, but none have been reported.

6. Frasca (1984, 178) also remarks that Vēlāḷars are conspicuously absent among composers of Terukkūttu dramas, which are in the main the work of Vaṇṇiyars and Vaṇṇārs. Our discussion, however, will traverse some "Mutaliyār" exceptions.

It is, however, in the actual festival context that the relation between the two performance genres becomes most crucial for understanding their distinctive treatments of the *Mahābhārata*. Generally, the full skein of a Draupadī festival has the following design:

--A-I-----B ₁ -----I-----C ₂ -----*-D-I-E-	
I	I *
Pārata Piracāṅkam	I *
-----B-----I-----C ₁ -----*-D ₁ -----	
	I *
Terukkūttu	*
-----C-----	

7. The nine grains are given a *Mahābhārata* mythology in one of the Terukkūttu dramas; see below, chap. 13, sec. C. The flag may show a figure of Hanumān, like the battle flag of Arjuna's chariot, and the temple flagstaff can be connected with Pōttu Rāja.

in relation to the ritual cycle and the interval of Terukkūttu. In the first (B), he introduces the *Mahābhārata*, concentrating on material from the epic's first book, the *Ādi Parvan* ("Book of Beginnings"), which provides background to the epic's main story. During this time, temple ritual (B₁) is minimal. In the second, in which festival activities are intensified by Terukkūttu presentation (C), the pāratīyār continues his narrative (C₁) while ritual activity is heightened (C₂). More specifically, the Piracaṅkam and Kūttu bring their renditions of *Pāratam* to one and the same culmination, the end of the *Mahābhārata* war, which is also the climactic point (marked by the column of asterisks) of the ritual cycle. This correlation between the Terukkūttu and the heightening of ritual involves numerous points of intersection between ritual and drama that will be noted in due course. Finally, with the Terukkūttu usually complete with the end of the war, the pāratīyār remains to recite at certain ceremonies that still bear on the completion of the *Mahābhārata* aspect of the *Pāratam* festival, most notably the *tarumar paṭṭāpicēkam*, the postwar crowning of Dharma.

If we look at this diagram in terms of the overall temporal relation between Piracaṅkam and Kūttu, we will see that whereas the former has as its main task to present the *Pāratam* "whole," the latter has as its main task to enact those aspects of the *Pāratam* that have the greatest significance in relation to the festival's period of highest ritual intensity. When the Terukkūttu heightens the *Pāratam* during phase C, the narrative functions of the Piracaṅkam largely become those of providing continuity and background based on the authoritative *Mahābhārata* of the textual tradition. The pāratīyār is essentially free to continue his narrative through this period as he chooses. In particular, he may dwell on episodes that the dramas omit: most notably scenes from the epic's third book and the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gītā*.⁸ But it is the dramas which now intensify the festival. In phase D, in which the pāratīyār usually concludes his narrative, his role is determined by the closing ceremonies, and his discourse will normally be quite brief.⁹

8. *Bhagavad Gītā* instruction is included in the Piracaṅkam of B. Kothandarama Goundar (Maṅkaḷam, 1982).

9. An exception is Brameesa Mudaliyar's occasional practice of holding a special *Śāntiparvan* ceremony. This involves reciting and discoursing on the *Rājadharmā* ("Royal Duty"), *Āpad Dharma* ("Duty in Times of Distress"), and *Mokṣadharmā* ("Duty with regard to Salvation") sections of the *Śāntiparvan*, consisting of the postwar speeches of Bhiṣma to the Pāṇdavas as he lies dying, filled with arrows, on the battlefield. As Villi dispenses with the *Śāntiparvan*, the text of reference is Nallāp-piḷlai's *Pāratam*. During the course of this recitation, a fire offering (*yākam*) is per-

Table 3. Opening Piracāṅkam Topics of V. M. Brameesa Mudaliyar

-
1. Eulogy of Vināyakar (Gaṇeśa) and Story of Utaṅka (Utaṅkar)
 2. Birth of Garuḍa and Janamejaya's Snake Sacrifice
 3. Story of Yayāti
 4. The Greatness (*perumai*) of Śakuntalā, Duṣyanta, and Bharata
 5. Marriage of Śāntanu, Birth and Vows of Bhīṣma
 6. Births of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Pāṇḍu, and Vidura
 7. Birth of Karna, Marriage of Pāṇḍu, Births of the Pāṇḍavas
 8. Descent of Kṛṣṇa (*Kaṇṇaṇ avatāram*)
 9. Birth of Draupadī (*Ampāl Tōrram* or *Śrī Pāñcālī Tōrram*), Dharma Titled as Heir Apparent (*Tarumar Ilavaracu Paṭṭam*)
 10. Lacquer House, Bhīma's Fight with Hiḍimba
 11. Death of Baka and Bending of the Bow (*Pakaṇ Vataiyum Vilvaḷaippum*)
-

It is thus the pāratīyār's introduction of the *Mahābhārata* in phase B that marks his most distinctive contribution to the *Pāratam* as a whole. Here, often at great leisure (thirty-two days at Tindivanam; more frequently around twenty days), he can spin out the *Mahābhārata* tales of the *Ādi Parvan* before the dramas begin. By way of example, table 3 lists the topics normally covered by Brameesa Mudaliyar up to the marriage of Draupadī, the point in the overall epic narrative that, if it does not mark the beginning of the Kūttu cycle, is at least always near its beginning and never left out.¹⁰

According to Brameesa Mudaliyar and Venkatesha Bhagavatar, it is—after customary invocations of Gaṇeśa as the transcriber of the epic—the tangled tale of Utaṅka that begins the *Mahābhārata*: the trials in Nāgaloka that lead him, once he has escaped, to exhort King Janamejaya, the descendant of the Pāṇḍavas, to perform the great snake sacrifice at which the *Mahābhārata* is told. This story then provides the context for narration of the primal births of Garuḍa (Viṣṇu's "eagle" mount and king of birds) and the snakes from their mothers' eggs, and the beginnings of *Pāratam* narration

formed, representing the Aśvamedha sacrifice that relieves Dharma of his sorrows. At the end a special ceremony with lamp waving (*dīpārāḍhanā*) and distribution of food to the public is performed to mark *Piṣmar Mōkṣam*, Bhīṣma's heavenly ascent to salvation. This ceremony, begun after the recitation of Dharma's postwar crowning, was performed over a thirty-day period at Perunakar, the pāratīyār's native village. At Iluppakuṇam (1980), he reduced it to a one-day ceremony between the end of the dramas and the crowning ceremony.

10. The list is combined from his recitations at Tindivanam (1981), Māṇāmpāṭi (1980), and Iluppakuṇam, where he took respectively thirty-four, eleven, and ten days to cover the material. Like Brameesa Mudaliyar, Venkatesha Bhagavatar also combined the two episodes of day 11 under one day's title at Kārappaṭṭu in 1980.

by Vaiṣampāyana, the pupil of Vyāsa. Other pāratyārs thus often include around this point a discourse on the birth or descent of Vyāsa (*Viyācar Pirappu* or *Viyācar Avatāram*).¹¹ Then the emphasis shifts to the stories of the early scions of the Lunar dynasty, most notably of Yayāti, whose Draupadī cult importance has been observed already (see chap. 3, n. 6; chap. 5, no. 28), and of King Duṣyanta's forgotten promise to marry the popular heroine Śakuntalā, mother of Bharata. From there the narrative moves toward the generations that lead up to the births and early careers of the main epic heroes, above all the tales of Arjuna's bending of the bow and Draupadī's wedding.

From the marriage of Draupadī on to the death of Duryodhana, the Piracaṅkam and Kūttu cover the same span of epic narrative. But within the general framework of our diagram, there is much latitude for variation. First of all, it must be recognized that there are some temples that hold festivals without all three of these components. There is, of course, always ritual, and usually at least something that passes for Piracaṅkam. But it is not uncommon to find festivals without Terukkūttu. Usually the absence of one genre or the other occurs either because the temple cannot raise sufficient funds to pay the performers, or because it lies outside the area where the performers normally circulate: that is, the core area of the cult.

In the single case found, at Villupuram, where a member of the drama troupe doubled at certain rituals for the absent pāratyār, the main reason was said to be financial. But where the Terukkūttu is omitted, geographical reasons seem to predominate. An urban estrangement from the rural core area seems to affect some of the temples (Sowcarpet, Muthialpet) in Madras City that do without Kūttu. Factors of distance would seem to have similarly affected temples to the immediate west (Vīrapāṇṭi, Chinna Salem, Salem) and south (Olaiyūr) of the core area. Indeed, farther afield at the Kuṇiyamattūr temple in Coimbatore City, the respondent to my questionnaire indicated that formerly both Piracaṅkam and Kūttu were performed, with two or three nights of the latter that have now been discontinued. It is clearly far more difficult to bring in a whole drama troupe over a long distance than it is to invite a single pāratyār or—as is no doubt more often the practice—to find one locally. Indeed, whereas *Mahābhārata*-performing Terukkūttu troupes seem to be restricted to the core area, there are probably numerous individuals outside that area who perform at Draupadī

11. The first is Venkatesha Bhagavata's title, the second the 1982 Mēlcāttamaṅkaḷam pāratyār's.

festivals and claim the title of pāratīyār. One pāratīyār from Parāṇam village, Ariyalur Taluk, Tiruchirappalli District—an elderly man named Ataikala Bharatīyar interviewed by Pon Kothandaraman—performed at regional Draupadī festivals using the classical Kathākālakṣepam sytle. Another, performing locally in the same taluk, was described by one of my questionnaire respondents as having made his reputation at Draupadī festivals in Singapore.

More crucial for our purposes, however, is to note that in the far more common cases where both genres are performed together, the *Mahābhārata* is itself affected by the manner in which they are integrated, or correlated, within specific festivals. Here two factors are most decisive. One is attitudinal. Given the aforementioned sociological variables in the two modes of performance, one will not be surprised to find a considerable range of attitudes toward each other among the two types of performers. My two main Terukkūttu informants were deferential toward the pāratīyārs, well aware that some of their own dramas were not based on any classical text, but convinced nonetheless of the authenticity, value, and cultic significance of their traditions. Most likely such an attitude extends to other dramatists and their troupes, but I made no general inquiries on the matter. Among pāratīyārs, however, the Kūttu evoked a considerable gamut of responses, from the deeply engaged to the benevolently indifferent to the disdainfully critical. At the latter pole, Brameesa Mudaliyar volunteered that the Terukkūttu “spoils” the *Mahābhārata* and is “unfit for modern times.” If—as he told me he often did—he gave air to such sentiments in performance, denouncing the crude humor of the Kūttu, spurning such plays as “Pōrmaṇṇaṇ’s Fight” and “Draupadī the Gypsy,” and decrying firewalking as without epic justification, it would surely affect the way the *Mahābhārata* was locally received.¹²

The most decisive factor shaping such overlapping epic presentations, however, is essentially organizational, and to some extent, this lies in the hands of the temple trustees who organize each local festival. Individual temples have settled into patterns that, at least in the decade of my study, have been basically consistent from one year’s festival to the next. The main overall determinant is the length of time allotted to each of these two performance genres.

Frequently built at some point into the festival structure is the number eighteen, the signature number of the *Mahābhārata*. Out of twenty-six temples where information on both genres was gath-

12. Brameesa Mudaliyar gave up participating in the firewalk ten years prior to my meeting him. It may be noted that his Piracaṅkam was recalled at Cantirampāṭi, one of the villages where he had performed some years earlier, as “too difficult.”

ered, nine count eighteen days of Piracaṅkam lectures, four claim eighteen nights of Terukkūttu, one has eighteen days of Piracaṅkam before the Kūttu, and one temple gets to eighteen by adding ten days of Piracaṅkam and eight nights of Kūttu. But whether the number eighteen is reached literally or not, it is incorporated symbolically at the point where Piracaṅkam and Kūttu ultimately converge: in the concluding drama and Piracaṅkam topic, inevitably titled "Eighteenth-Day War," which together mark the culmination of both performance genres at nearly all these festivals.

Beyond these eighteen-day parameters, festivals with eighteen (or more) days of Kūttu may set them in a span of anywhere from twenty (Marutāṭu) to fifty-five (Tindivanam) days of Piracaṅkam. And festivals with eighteen days of Piracaṅkam have been found to bring them to culmination with anywhere from five to ten nights of Kūttu. Most common in the latter group (three of nine cases) is the pattern of eighteen days of Piracaṅkam and ten nights of Kūttu, a point that cautions us about Frasca's attempt to generalize on the basis of the eighteen-day Piracaṅkam/nine-night Kūttu cycle of Iruṅkal (see n. 4). Frasca also suggests that nine was chosen as half of eighteen for aesthetic (too much repetition), ritual (trimming to essentials), and economic reasons (1984, 159–60, 165–67). Counting his information from Iruṅkal in our sample of twenty-six, however, we find ten-night drama cycles at six temples and nine-night cycles at only four. In neither case, however, are these numbers the result of a casual halving. As we have seen in chapters 3 and 4, ten-day festivals to village goddesses are patterned after the ten-day Dasarā festival to Durgā. The nine-night alternative is undoubtedly modeled after Navarātra, the nine nights of worshipping the goddess that fall within the ten days of Dasarā. The Terukkūttu dramas themselves can thus provide a "nine nights" worship. Rather than nine being counted as half of eighteen, it would be more correct to say that eighteen is the equivalent of ten (or nine) as the appropriate length of a festival celebrating the goddess through the *Mahābhārata*. In this respect, it is also highly significant that within the Draupadī cult, it is the Terukkūttu that frequently provides the counterpart to this most preeminent of royal rituals. Let us not then be surprised to find the dramas evoking Dasarā's mythic and ritual themes.

Once the ratio of Piracaṅkam and Kūttu is set, there remains further variation in the way each local festival correlates them. Here the number of festival days, set according to the temple's tradition, must be filled with actual Piracaṅkam topics and dramas. Temple officiants generally keep some record of their most recent festivals and seek to repeat their basic format. But when they bring in new

performers, they will be flexible enough to adjust the schedule to their different specializations. Here again Frasca's generalizations on the basis of the Iruṅkal festival are misleading. The Iruṅkal festival presents a tightly arranged correlation of Piracaṅkam, Kūttu, and ritual. In brief, prior to the beginning of the dramas, the pāratīyār carries his Piracaṅkam up to the point where the dramas begin: the marriage of Draupadī. From that point on through the rest of the festival, the pāratīyār's discourses run parallel to the subjects of the dramas, narrating, commenting on, and providing background in the afternoon for the episodes that will be enacted at night, and in certain cases reenacted as temple ritual on the following day (Frasca 1984, 327–32). I have met this ideal arrangement myself at Mēlcāttamaṅkaḷam, but it can by no means be regarded as a norm.

According to Brameesa Mudaliyar, the pāratīyār's pace of presentation is in no way determined by the dramas. His only obligation is to bring his discourses *au courant* by the end of the drama cycle. In practice, this means he will almost invariably bring his lectures into coincidence with the dramas for the last two days of Kūttu, converging at "Karna's Mokṣa" and "Eighteenth-Day War." But he may also bring his performance into conjunction with the Kūttu at any time earlier. This means, of course, that there is no general attempt to bring the Piracaṅkam in line with the Kūttu from the usual starting point of the latter at Draupadī's wedding. Though I have encountered some festivals where this is done (one involving Brameesa Mudaliyar, Iluppakuṇam, 1980), they are far more the exception than the rule. I have thus found festivals where the opening Terukkūttu drama is preceded by afternoon Piracaṅkam on topics of considerable range: first-book episodes that precede the wedding (Brameesa Mudaliyar, Tindivanam, 1981); a wide variety of topics from the third book on the forest exile (e.g., Bhīma's quest to bring Draupadī the heavenly Saugandhika flower (Brameesa Mudaliyar, Māṇāmpāṭi, 1980); and even episodes as late as Kṛṣṇa's fifth-book embassy to the Kauravas (Kothandarama Goundar, Maṅkaḷam, 1982). Along with the individual pāratīyār's inclinations, the major variable is how many days of Piracaṅkam have preceded the start of the dramas. In all cases where the pāratīyār has had more than just the nine or so days prior to the opening of Kūttu, as he is given at Iruṅkal, he is likely to have gone farther into the story than the point at which the Kūttu begins.

Moreover, when the two genres are brought into conjunction, the Kūttu performance of the episode can precede the pāratīyār's narrative exposition of the scene. This was the case at several places where Brameesa Mudaliyar performed, and it somewhat modifies

Frasca's otherwise useful notion of an oscillation back and forth between the innate story (*katai*) of the temple ritual, the sung narrative (*pāṭṭu*) of the Piracaṅkam (which incorporates the *katai*), and the danced and dramatized enactment of the Kūttu (which embraces both *katai* and *pāṭṭu*) (see Frasca 1984, 332–33). Though oscillation there is, it is rarely so regular as Frasca suggests, and as I have already remarked, there is more disjunction between the three levels of *katai* than he suggests.

Given these factors, let me now indicate how I will pursue the basic design of the Darupadī cult's *Mahābhārata*. Of the three levels of story, I will say the least about those narrative themes that arise solely from the ritual cycle. As to the Piracaṅkam and Terukkūttu, I will give primary weight to the latter because of its narrative status between the Piracaṅkam and the ritual and its capacity to intensify the *Mahābhārata*'s most significant cultic themes. Having already summarized the introductory function of the Piracaṅkam, I will henceforth take the *pāratiyārs'* main text, the *Villipāratam*, as my primary guide to the basic content of the Piracaṅkam and discuss it as it parallels, amplifies, or differs from the dramas. I am well aware, and shall sometimes observe, that the Piracaṅkam contains much oral tradition, that Villi's is not the only *Pāratam* that has influenced the Piracaṅkam, and that the *pāratiyārs* often attribute things to Villi that are not in the text. But Villi is their anchor, and serves well to guide us through the main contents of the Piracaṅkam. I will also keep track of the Sanskrit version of the *Mahābhārata*, though primarily in terms of the ways that the Tamil versions vary from it.

As to the dramas, I will simply follow their narrative momentum from the start of the Terukkūttu cycle to its finish. But first, let us look more closely at two matters: the composition of the "full" repertoire of festival dramas and certain specifics that concern the relation between the dramas and the cycle of temple-sponsored ritual.

B. The Terukkūttu in Historical Perspective

I can do little more than add some of my own reflections to what has been said by others on the origins of Terukkūttu and its relation to other regional South Indian forms of dance drama. The earliest references to Kūttu, involving the nominal forms *kūttar* or *kūttan* as "performer of Kūttu," are found in the Caṅkam poetry anthologies (ca. first to third centuries A.D.) and the *Tolkāppiyam*, the treatise on grammar and poetic conventions that was probably

completed a few centuries after the anthologies (Frasca 1984, 69; cf. Hart 1975, 7–10). While the Sanskrit term *nāṭaka* also came to be used in this period, defining in the *Tolkāppiyam* the more technical sense of theatrical drama, *kūttar* referred to specialists in certain “ritual performing arts” (Frasca 1984, 69), “professional actors who were also known for their nomadic character” (Subramanyam 1979, 17), “a particular group of bards” with a “knowledge of stories” that they enacted (Sivathamby 1981, 361; see also Kai lasapathy 1968, 100–105). The *Cilappatikāram* (ca. A.D. 450) widens our scope on this early period in its depiction of various danced enactments of episodes from the mythologies of Murukan and Kṛṣṇa, which can also be included under a broad but rather loose definition of Kūttu (Frasca 1984, 58–59; Sivathamby 1981, 361, Meyer 1981, 38–39). But it is impossible to trace anything resembling the present Terukkūttu to this period, much less an epic-related dramatized mythology.

During the Chola period, inscriptions mention that plays glorifying the Chola kings were performed at temple festivals in Thanjavur. But it is not until the Nayak period, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, that we find reference to various forms of folk drama (Arunachalam 1974, 49, 50; Meyer 1981, 39; Perumal 1981, 55–75). Among these is the *Kuṛavañci*, offshoots of which are included in the *Mahābhārata* repertoire of the Terukkūttu. It is possibly during this period that a repertoire of *Mahābhārata* plays began to crystallize in the Gingee area for use at Draupadī festivals. Arunachalam (1976, 47–58) estimates at around 1600 the beginnings of a Tamil ballad tradition that includes among its earliest productions a number of ballads on *Mahābhārata* themes. As this repertoire of ballads grows, virtually all of its title episodes, including some drawn from folk *Mahābhārata* traditions, come to have their counterparts in the Terukkūttu. If the ballads are earlier—and we have no guarantee that they are—there is no reason to think that the dramas would have been far behind them. Another clue that the Terukkūttu repertoire was shaped during this period is the fact that certain early Kūttus are called Yakṣagānas (Sivathamby 1981, 358; Subramanyam 1979, 16). Indeed, though Yakṣagāna survives as a comparable drama form in the neighboring Kannada-speaking state of Karnataka (see Ashton and Christie 1977), Yakṣagānas were also composed in both Tamil and Telugu. The use of this term in all these languages suggests that the Tamil tradition could have adopted it as an equivalent to Kūttu during the Nayak period, when mutual influences between the three language areas were greatest.

The relation between Terukkūttu and other neighboring regional drama forms—not only the Yakṣagāna but the Kūṭiyāṭṭam and Kathakali of Kerala, the Vīthi Nāṭakam (actually a Sanskrit term meaning “street drama,” exactly the same thing as Terrukkūttu) of Andhra, and the Nāṭṭukkūttus of the Tamil-speaking Batticaloa area of Sri Lanka—has been noted by various scholars (Iyer 1966, 13; Frasca 1984, 52; Subramanyam 1979, 12; Sivathamby 1981, 357–60), emphasizing what Sivathamby calls “formal” similarities. Further, Sivathamby remarks that “all these different dramatic forms take themes” from the two epics, and that “much of what goes as epic material is really a fusion of local legends” and the epic stories. He seems, however, to imply that it is not only the formal but the thematic similarities that provide an “indication of a common prototype” (1981, 360). On this point, however, I am less than comfortable. To be sure, the prominence of the two epics, and especially the *Mahābhārata*, in these regional drama forms suggests that the epics had a sort of “prototypical” significance for them. Though generalizations on this point are risky, it would seem that at least three of them—the Kathakali (see Nagaraja Rao 1979, 76–77), Yakṣagāna, and Terukkūttu—drew on epic traditions that had developed in vernacular forms during (if not before) the Vijayanagar and Nayak periods, with the first known dramas probably composed during the seventeenth century. There are, of course, certain themes that are distinctive to this South Indian epic mythology, most notably concerning Draupadī’s hair (see chaps. 11, 18, and chap. 2, n. 16). But it is doubtful that there is a coherent folk epic prototype outside the Sanskrit epics themselves. Anyone who examines how differently the epics are treated in these three regional drama forms (see Bolland 1980, 13–43; Ashton and Christie 1977) will easily recognize that it is not so much a distinctive common prototype that shapes them as their different regional mythologies.

Against such a background of regional mythologies and vernacularizations of the epics, the *Mahābhārata* repertoire of the Draupadī cult Terukkūttu is distinctive on two fronts. First, it is a specialization within the genre of Kūttu itself. Terukkūttu has this *Mahābhārata* repertoire only in the Draupadī cult core area (see chap. 3, n. 24). In more southern parts of Tamilnadu (excepting the very deep south), a non-epic Terukkūttu repertoire has been shaped around other local deities and cults.¹³ In Kerala the ritual possession

13. Frasca 1984, 135. A similar division seems to be found in the Sri Lankan Nāṭṭukkūttu: only its northern form has a repertoire drawn from the two epics (Sivathamby, 358).

dances of the Teyyam cult are also called Kūttu (Frasca 1984, 45, 136). Further, it is likely that dramas still performed in Sri Lanka in connection with folk versions of the *Cilappatikāram* story of Kaṇṇaki and Kovalan, celebrating Kaṇṇaki as the afflicted chaste wife, or *pattinī*, represent a survival of earlier diffusions of Kūttu in connection with a South Indian Pattinī cult that has now all but disappeared from both Tamilnadu and Kerala (see Obeyesekere 1984, 225–82, 530–52). The oft-stated view that a now defunct Pattinī cult provided the prototype for Draupadī, or for the Draupadī cult, has always been made too casually (see Dikshitar 1939, 371; Obeyesekere 1984, 3; Frasca 1984, 134). I know of no evidence that it was ever prevalent in the northern parts of Tamilnadu where the Draupadī cult has supposedly replaced it. But it is at least a parallel, and possibly influential, case of a goddess cult developing a body of similar ritual-related dramas.

What is most distinctive about the Draupadī cult *Mahābhārata* of the Terukkūttu is that it seems to provide the only case where one of the epics is dramatized specifically in relation to an epic-defined cult. Kathakali is most often performed at temples of Bhagavatī, in Kerala a name for Kālī. Yakṣagāna performances are often held at various goddess temples (Ashton and Christie 1977, 50–52; Prabhu 1977, 102, 169–73). And according to my two main Terukkūttu informants, Terukkūttu plays on the *Rāmāyaṇa* are performed in the Draupadī cult core area at Māriyamman festivals. It is, of course, significant that the epics so often provide the primary material for dramatization at festivals for regional “folk goddesses.” But again, it is in the Draupadī cult that this connection undergoes its most intense mythologization around the figure of the epic heroine as goddess.

Let us, then, look more closely at this epic repertoire of the Terukkūttu. Once we move into the seventeenth century, we have a likely combination of catalysts, all of which have already been noted: the Draupadī cult itself; the narrative structure of the *Vil-lipāratam*, which had no doubt by this time become the main text of reference for the pāratiyārs at Draupadī festivals; a varied folk theater; and the development of *Mahābhārata* balladry combining both classical and folk themes. Frasca (1984, 140) has also found that certain of his performer-informants believed, without being able to state specifics, that the Terukkūttu originally emanated from the Gingee area. Though such statements could reflect more recent conditions, it is possible that they recall the period when Gingee was a royal center, which ends with the death of Rāja Desing in 1714.

It is not, however, until the nineteenth century that we begin to get hard data that bear on the composition of our Terukkūttu epic corpus. At this point, we must note a distinction that Frasca has brought to our attention. Though the term *terukkūttu* has certainly attained widespread use in connection with our dramas and will continue to be used in our discussions as the main term of reference, Frasca found that professional groups refer to their performance purely as *kūttu*, and regard the denotation of *teru*—"street" *kūttu*—as derogatory. To clarify this, one *vāṭṭiyār* (troupe director) specified that *kūttu* refers to "performances at prestigious village festivals put on by professional groups within the confines of a specified performing area," whereas *terukkūttu* "applies only to the context where semiprofessional or local groups enact small excerpts of larger episodes while participating in a ritual procession through a village. They act and dance as they walk. The fact that they are part of a procession moving along a 'street' or byway is what is truly designated by the prefixed '*teru*' " (Frasca 1984, 96). I did not encounter this distinction myself and would note that it invites speculation. Does it result from an attempt to give the art form a better name by purging it of a "common" element?¹⁴ Or is it a traditionally valid distinction between two performance styles that popular tastes, or even the ignorance of the educated, have come to confuse?¹⁵

Whatever the case, the distinction is real and points to important differences in the ways that epic scenes can be dramatized at Draupadī festivals. What is most suggestive for our present purposes, however, is that though the two styles are different, there is certainly a relation between them. At Vīrapāṇṭi, where one epic scene is performed by local actors and no professionals are brought in at

14. The fact that festival poster announcements usually refer to the dramas by the Sanskrit term *nāṭakam*, rather than either *kūttu* or *terukkūttu*, points in a similar direction.

15. There is a very patronizing tone to the article by Iyer entitled "Therukoothu or Street Play" (1966). He supposes that the "shows used to be put up in street junctions, and hence the name" (14). This author scoured Tamilnadu in the mid to late 1950s looking for troupes "which keep up the genuine art tradition" so as to "popularize the best among them." One after another tried and failed, until "at last one troupe was found to come up to my expectations" (15). This one, the Raghava Thambiran troupe of Purisai village, Cheyyar Taluk, North Arcot, was given opportunities to perform in Madras in the early sixties, and has since maintained a strong grip on what small patronage and interest there is from Madras's cultured advocates of traditional folk arts (see also Subramanyam 1979, 15). I saw this troupe perform a very polished "Dice Match and Disrobing" on the Madras Museum stage in 1981. Cf. also chap. 3, n. 24.

all, a temple informant referred to such enactments as the "old style," implying that the cycle of Draupadī cult plays that one finds at other festivals had developed out of local rituals. We must, of course, suspect that matters are not quite that simple. While I have noted the likely ritual origins of Kūttu itself, the development of a repertoire of Draupadī cult plays was certainly influenced by classical dance and drama (see Frasca 1984, 186–234; Subramanyam 1979, 12–20) no less than by local temple rituals. But that some relationship exists is undeniable, and deserves further examination.

In pursuing this vein, we are thus once again fortunate to be able to benefit from the labors of Colin Mackenzie. We need only recall that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Draupadī festival at Dindigul was organized around eighteen days of street processions, each one representing a different scene from the *Vil-lipāratam*, enacted in at least one and possibly all cases by local actors, and accompanied by narration of the epic episodes with Tamil songs using the bell and the *uṭukkai* drum. As was noted in chapter 3, it is the decentralized situation of the Dindigul temple that would seem to have inspired a process whereby different elements of Draupadī cult ceremonial came to be condensed. Among these, most prominently, is the model of a festival with Terukkūttu. In other words, it would seem that the Dindigul festival was shaped by an effort to duplicate, in local terms, a festival that included eighteen Terukkūttu dramas. We thus appear to have as our earliest data on the *Mahābhārata* repertoire of the Terukkūttu a case where true "street dramas" of the type described by Frasca's informant had come to substitute for more traditional *Mahābhārata* "Kūttu." Table 4 lists, in sequence, how the eighteen days were filled with locally enacted street processions. Certain narrative details supplied by Mackenzie's source are included.

The makeup of these eighteen street scenes would tend to confirm the condensate character of the Dindigul festival. The description of the eighteenth, which I have simplified greatly for now, clearly comes from the ritual sphere. I reserve discussion of the myth told at this point for our concluding chapter, and need only note that the Dindigul festival shows an apparent innovation here in reserving the eighteenth day for the processional presentation of the firewalking myth as prelude to the firewalking ritual. In doing so, it sets forward to the seventeenth day the epic episode that is usually dramatized and ritualized prior to the firewalk on the eighteenth day: the death of Duryodhana. It also combines the latter, in its seventeenth-day position, with the coronation of Dharma, a scene that is usually only ritually enacted, with Pira-caṅkam, some days after the firewalk.

Table 4. Draupadī Festival Street Dramas in Early Nineteenth-Century Dindigul

- 1–5. Stories of the birth and upbringing of Kṛṣṇa, the births of Dharmaputra, Duryodhana, and the hundred Kauravas.
6. Arjuna bends the bow to win Draupadī, two persons acting their parts (see chap. 3).
7. Marriage of Draupadī and Arjuna.
8. Arjuna goes to 1,008 Śiva temples and 108 temples sacred to Viṣṇu, and bathes in all the sacred rivers.
9. Rājasūya sacrifice (*yākam*).
10. Duryodhana attempts to break Draupadī's pride (*māṇapaṅkam paṇṇi*) by having his kinsman disrobe her (*paṅkāli tuyilurikki*).
11. "The Poisoned Water Tank" (*naccuppoikai*): in the forest, the Pāṇḍavas drink from a tank that Duryodhana has poisoned. Each falls faint, including Dharma. Kṛṣṇa comes and revives them.
12. Nelli tree episode.
13. Arjuna's tapas.
14. Period of dwelling in disguise (*akkiṇātavācam*) in the kingdom of Virāṭa.
15. The cities of Indraprastha and Upaplavya (*Uppilāviyapaṭṭaram*) become allies; incident of buying the Cēkkirāyaṇ Fort (*kōṭṭai*).
16. Arjuna gives his son Nallaraivāṇ to Mahākālī in sacrifice (*kaṭapoli*) at Kurukṣetra.
17. Fight between Bhīma and Duryodhana, Bhīma obtains victory with his mace; Duryodhana dies, Dharma becomes king of Hāstinapura.
18. After the war the Pāṇḍavas seek atonement for the deaths caused in the war. Kṛṣṇa tells Draupadī to walk on fire to achieve atonement.

The first five days and the twelfth present topics that derive mainly from the repertoire of the pāratyārs, the only exception being the birth and upbringing of Kṛṣṇa, which can be treated by both Piracaṅkam and Kūttu. In other cases, the description suggests only a tangential connection with the current dramas. For example, the reference in 8 is obviously to Arjuna's *tīrthayātrā*, but it includes no mention of the marriages he contracts during that period. In the dramas it is the marriages, not Arjuna's piety, that are of interest. The description of the alliance between Indraprastha and Upaplavya in 15 must refer to the marriage of Abhimanyu and Uttarā at the end of the drama "The Fight over the Cattle Raid." Here there is no reference to the title episode, and I am in the dark about the Cēkkirāyaṇ Fort, although it seems to be suggested that the Pāṇḍavas purchase it as a base from which to wage war.¹⁶ But all the other references are to epic scenes with precise Teruk-kūttu counterparts, and in some cases the descriptions include the

16. The significance of forts in the *Mahābhārata* war—something of which the classical epic says nothing—is a feature of Draupadī cult epic folklore that I will remark on again, but reserve for fuller discussion in volume 2.

title episodes drawn ultimately from Villi (6, 7, 9, 11, 13) or very precise language that evokes the material of a play (10, 14, 16, 17). The only discordances are that Arjuna's *tapas* (13) comes after forest episodes (11, 12) that precede it in Villi, and, as already mentioned, that the killing of Duryodhana (17) is combined in one set with the coronation of Dharma. In this latter case, it is certainly hard to imagine how both of the scenes could be presented conjointly without "street drama" transitions.

With this Dindigul information, we are certainly within the Terukkūttu's frame of discourse. But we still cannot be absolutely certain that real Terukkūttu dramas preexisted this early nineteenth-century South Tamilian condensation. The evidence for a richly diversified corpus of Terukkūttu dramas, including those linked with the Draupadī cult, is not, however, long in coming. It takes the form of what may be called a literary movement that begins in the early 1800s and has still not exhausted itself, involving the composition and chapbook publication of countless plays. Let me note, before examining this movement, that it is hardly to be thought that it created its drama repertoire *de novo*. Today one finds that drama troupes work primarily from their own paper manuscripts of songs and dialogues, not from the published plays, which they treat, if they use them at all, rather as skeletal works of reference. As Frasca has found (1984, 117–20; cf. 221–45), paper manuscripts have only within the last fifty years, within the memory of some of his informants, replaced the use of palm-leaf manuscripts for the same purpose. In either case, troupe leaders would regard these manuscripts as a repertoire to be guarded and kept from other troupes with whom they were in competition (*ibid.*, 183). The literary movement before us almost certainly drew on preexistent dramas, and more specifically on earlier material of the type found in palm-leaf manuscripts, to create a new hybrid of published folk dramas.

C. Folk Drama Literature and the Draupadī Festival's Terukkūttu Performance Repertoire

This literature of folk dramas comprises an enormous number of plays. Frasca estimates a full corpus of between two and three hundred printed plays, citing Perumal's list of 257 (Frasca 1984, 150; Perumal 1981, 221–45). But given the many we know of that neither author mentions, it would probably be better to double this estimate. This literary movement also has had many branches. Even regarding just *Mahābhārata* plays, there are evident subtypes,

some of which find analogues in non-*Mahābhārata* dramas. For our purposes, it will be helpful to treat subtypes within the group of *Mahābhārata* dramas as our primary set of categories. This will mean recognizing epic-based dramas of four types.

First, and most indispensable, is the group of plays that provide the basic skein of episodes that carry along the central *Mahābhārata* story as it is related in the *Villipāratam*: that is, from the youths of the heroes to the end of the war. Most, but not all of these, are currently enacted at Draupadī festivals, and at many festivals—particularly shorter ones—it is only plays from this group that are included. Most of these exist in printed form in what I will call the Irattīṇa Nāyakar collection: that is, the group of *Mahābhārata* plays published by Irattīṇa Nāyakar and Sons Publishers of Madras.

Second, there is a group of plays that enact episodes of *Mahābhārata* folklore that have no basis in any classical version of the *Mahābhārata* but are connected in one way or another with the Draupadī cult. All of these may have existed at one time or another in printed form, but in some cases chapbook versions are no longer traceable. Of those currently available, several are included in the Irattīṇa Nāyakar collection. When such dramas are performed at Draupadī festivals, they are included in small numbers. Yet as we shall see, the ones that do enter the festival repertoire are mythologically important in a way that goes far beyond their incidence of performance. For the moment, we can note that within this group there are two main subtypes: plays detailing extra-epic marriages of the heroes (principally Arjuna), and plays focusing on aspects of Draupadī cult ritual, relating ceremonial matters to the epic story (the most important of these being “Draupadī the Gypsy” and “Pōrmaṇṇa’s Fight”). The play about Muttāl Rāvuttaṇ discussed in chapter 6 is a spinoff from within this latter subset.

A third group is concerned with classical *Mahābhārata* themes that are not currently performed at Draupadī festivals. In festival terms, the material they cover is the province of the pāratīyārs. It may be that some of these dramas were originally composed for festival performance and had limited local runs or certain troupes that specialized in them. This seems most likely in cases where they have been published by some of the smaller presses that print the material as folk dramas, and where the episodes fall within the same temporal skein as the other dramas in the festival cycle. A likely case in point would be the plays about Draupadī’s receiving the “inexhaustible vessel” (*akṣaya-pātra*) to feed her husbands in the forest and using it to humiliate the sage Durvāsas, who comes from Duryodhana to embarrass the Pāṇḍavas by begging food from them

after they have ostensibly finished what Draupadī has prepared.¹⁷ For the most part the plays in this category cover epic material that falls outside the period covered by the main drama cycle, dealing either with the origins of the Lunar dynasty and the ancestry of the Pāṇḍavas (Piracaṅkam material par excellence) or with episodes after the war. In nearly all cases, these dramas can be found only in old library versions now long out of print. The small presses—Iratṭiṇa Nāyakar and the rest—that have made Nāṭakam material accessible to twentieth-century audiences have ignored them.¹⁸ Several of these plays, however, were authored by the same men who composed dramas in the Iratṭiṇa Nāyakar collection that are performed at festivals.¹⁹ This would lead us to suspect that the authors in question chose their subject matter for other purposes than just festival performance, but that the principle by which certain plays were selected for collection and publication had to do in part with their centrality to the *Mahābhārata*, and in part with an audience whose tastes were influenced by what was popular at Draupadī festivals.

Finally, a fourth group, consisting of a sort of fantasy Nāṭakam literature about the heroes, inventing extra marriages for them, new offspring, new conflicts between them, and new demons for them to defeat, treats the classical epic only as a thematic cornucopia and has seemingly little to do with the ritual or mythical themes of the Draupadī cult. If these plays are performed at Draupadī festivals at all, it has surely been only as supplemental entertainment. As compositions, they appear to be relatively recent. None of them are to be found in the listings of earlier plays. One suspects that they represent a decadent phase of this genre, and

17. Pāṭaiyākṣiyār, n.d. The title page of this Vāṇi Vilācam Press publication indicates that the author (a Vaṇṇiyār) was from a village in Cuddalore Taluk. The Caṇmukāṇanta Puttakacālai and the C. M. Tamōtara Mutaliyār Press, both of Madras, have also published plays called *Tuvōcar Paṇka*, "The Humiliation of Durvāsas."

18. In addition to the three presses mentioned in n. 17, four others must be noted: the Śrī Lakṣmī Vācaṇ Press of Cuddalore (now defunct), the Amarampēṭu Irājaratṭiṇa Mutaliyār and Malarmakaḷ Vilācam Presses, and the Ar. Ji. Pati Company, all of Madras. The latter, like Iratṭiṇa Nāyakar, published Irāmaccantira Kavirāyār's "Dice Match and Disrobing" as recently as 1963.

19. Irāmaccantira Kavirāyār, in addition to several plays performed within the cycle, wrote *Cakuntalai Vilācam*, a drama about Śakuntalā (Madras, 1856; India Office Library, London; see n. 21). T. Taṇikācala Mutaliyār, author of "Draupadī the Gypsy," wrote *Pappiravākāṇa Caṇṭai Nāṭakam*, which describes Arjuna's postwar duel with his son Babhruvāhana (Madras 1912; India Office Library, London). The sources mentioned in n. 17 also indicate plays on such epic figures as Purūravas, Yayāti, and Nala and Damayanti.

insofar as they serve a reading public, it is probably one that retains a taste for this type of literature only so long as new episodes can be invented for its traditional heroes. The audience itself seems to be diminishing and increasingly limited to large population centers.²⁰ In contrast, the older dramas in the first three categories were probably first composed and published for an audience that was newly literate, still largely rural, and interested, through familiarity, in printed dramas that were inspired directly from festival contexts. I will largely disregard works of this fourth type, though a few of them will be discussed in chapters 10 and 13.

Of the four groups under discussion, then, I will deal mainly with the first two, for they supply virtually all the dramas that are performed with any regularity at Draupadī festivals. Although I have marked a distinction between them, it is only useful up to a point. At a certain level, the level of myth we seek most to explore, the first two types form essentially one Draupadī cult repertoire and one epic vision.

Beyond these four types, however, it is possible to look more closely at the early development of this drama literature as a whole. According to Arunachalam, the first phase of ballad printing “begins only after the year 1800” when the *kujilikkaṭai* (“evening bookshop”) presses began publishing their “cheap reprints of the classical ballads” (1976, 75). Soon after 1800, we have the first indications that dramas, usually on themes found also in the ballads, were likewise composed for publication by the same presses. I must insist again that this does not automatically establish the priority of the ballads over the dramas. Traditional Tamil ballad performances themselves can have dramatic elements (see Beck 1982, 36–103) that have clear kinship with the *Terukkūttu*. Moreover, many of the early ballads themselves had *Mahābhārata* themes. But most important, whereas ballads attributed to traditional authors were more or less ready-made for the transition to printing, festival drama material would have had to be transformed from anonymous palm-leaf collections of songs, dialogues, and performance keys, varying from troupe to troupe, into something that had a readable flow. This required new authors, who soon emerged to take up the task.

20. Not only have many of the presses closed, but so have most of the bookshops that sell such material (see Arunachalam 1976, 75–76). The sad situation Arunachalam describes as of 1974 remained the same as late as 1984: one “evening bazaar” bookshop near the Kantacāmi temple in Georgetown, Madras City, was still holding on where there used to be a flourishing trade. But in 1987 it was gone.

Using the publication data in Perumal's list of dramas and in the collection at the India Office Library, it is possible to get a fair picture of the development of this genre. The name at its source is clearly Irāmaccantira Kavirāyar. This author is described in the *Abithana Chintamani*, an encyclopedia on Tamil literature first published in 1899, as having lived about ninety years earlier, that is, around 1809. He was born in Irācanallūr or Irāyanallūr, a village that—though it is not listed in the Tamilnadu State Government's *District Census Handbook*—is said by my two main Terukkūttu informants to be in Wandiwash Taluk, North Arcot, between Wandiwash and Madurantakam. He lived in Madras and composed "*Mahābhārata* stories as dramas,"²¹ as well as other plays on purāṇic themes and one drama called *Irāṅkūṇ Caṇṭai Nāṭakam*, on the "Battle of Rangoon." This latter play would most likely have commemorated an incident in the First Burma War of 1824–26.²²

The India Office Library collection gives us the oldest publication dates available for his works, the earliest being 1829 for *Tārukāvaṇa Vilācam*. Of his *Mahābhārata* plays, two go back to 1857 ("Arjuna's Tapas and Deeds in Devaloka" and "Dice Match and Disrobing"), one to 1873 ("Bow-Bending and Garlanding," on Draupadī's marriage), and one to 1876 ("The Poisoned Tank"). Needless to say, these dates only indicate the oldest known copies collected. The India Office Library gives numerous more recent printings of most of these plays as well: a gauge, it would seem, of their popularity within the genre in the late nineteenth century. It is not unreasonable, however, given the 1829 date for our oldest record of one of his publications and the *Abithana Chintamani*'s estimate of 1809 as his period of activity, to infer that his *Mahābhārata* dramas were probably composed in the first, or no later than the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

21. Singaravelu Mudaliar [1899] 1981, 184: *pārata kataikalai vilācamāka* (*vilācam*, literally "sport" or "play" in both the English senses, a term for some Terukkūttu dramas, probably suggests a high Sanskrit tone like *Nāṭakam*). His *Cakuntalai Vilācam* has been fully translated into French (Devèze 1886–88), but with no introduction, notes, or comment on the author. But Irāmaccantira Kavirāyar declares of himself that he is a "poète saint" respected by "heros aux anneaux retentissants," and that he has "traduit en tamoul un drame de peu de valeur, une histoire qui a été composée par des hommes savants dans la langue sanscrite d'une si parfait douceur" (1886, 272). Cf. Hawley 1981, 166–67, on the role of Premānand in reshaping the Rās Līlā dramas of Braj.

22. Many Tamils worked for the British East India Company at this time in the Burma Delta, and were involved in the fighting there. The Second and Third Burma Wars of 1852 and the 1880s are less likely dates. My thanks to Robert Fryckenberg for his help in tracing this reference.

Born in the Draupadī cult heartland and settled in Madras, Irāmaccantira Kavirāyar perhaps had audiences from both of these worlds in mind. He most certainly wrote for the new Madras clientele of the evening bazaar bookshops. He probably also composed for the rural Terukkūttu troupes, who could turn to his compositions as readily accessible versions of their own plays, thereby popularizing his name and to some degree standardizing the dramas themselves. That is indeed what has happened, though to varying degrees from play to play. Of his four known *Mahābhārata* dramas, three cover episodes absolutely central to the Draupadī cult Terukkūttu repertoire: Draupadī's marriage, her disrobing, and Arjuna's tapas. If we were to ask where a poet would have started were he faced with the challenge of distilling the cult's popular dramas into literary form, we would arrive at this material. Though the fourth play, "The Poisoned Tank," was not performed at any temple within this study, it forms part of the repertoire of at least one current troupe (Iyer 1966, 15) and was represented by one of the processional street scenes at early nineteenth-century Dindigul (see above, table 4, no. 11, also table 5). Certainly the late nineteenth-century publication data make it clear that Irāmaccantira Kavirāyar was still known by that time as the author of all these dramas. However, as we shall see, he is today known within the Terukkūttu tradition for only one of them: his own masterpiece, and the centerpiece of the Draupadī cult drama cycle, "Dice Match and Disrobing."

We shall follow the descent into anonymity that has affected his other works in a moment. But we must first note certain ways in which his works were influential. If I am right that his were the first Draupadī cult festival dramas to be composed as literature, it is striking that they are among the most faithful in broad outline to the *Villipāratam*. This fidelity is especially evident in "Dice Match and Disrobing," which I will discuss in detail in chapter 11. Other Kūttu authors vary considerably in the degree to which they follow Villi. But one may suspect that Irāmaccantira Kavirāyar's position is seminal here in attempting to introduce into the literary composition of his dramas a classicism of this sort. In this vein, Kothandaraman (1983) has also looked at "Dice Match and Disrobing" in terms of the Terukkūttu "language idiom" that Irāmaccantira Kavirāyar helped to standardize in its literary form. He finds in this play an effort to evolve a common dialect cutting across regionalisms and caste idioms and employing a mixture of spoken and literary Tamil with some additions not found in either, not deliberate coinages but rather attempts by the author to adopt a

high literary tone. In actual performance, "popular" revisions—or reversions—often replace such classical elements.

As to the further evolution of this literature, and the eventual anonymity of many of its productions, it is necessary now to look into the formation of the Irattina Nāyakar collection. In his list of dramas, Perumal mentions two plays on *Mahābhārata* themes—"Pulantiran's Theft" (*kaḷavu*, his "stealing in" upon his young wife to make love to her for the first time) and "The Killing of Kīcaka"—which in 1873 and 1890 were already published by Irattina Nāyakar without citation of their authors. As early as 1867 a play on the *Rāmāyaṇa*—*Mayilirāvaṇaṇ Caṇṭai*—was similarly printed by the same publisher.²³ These and numerous other plays in the Irattina Nāyakar collection—on *Mahābhārata*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, and other topics—are still published in this form, copyrighted by one Ammaṇi Ammaḷ, wife of Cūlai Muṇicāmi Mutaliyār. Of the *Mahābhārata* plays, eighteen appear in this format, two of them being modified versions of Irāmaccantira Kavirāyar's plays about Draupadī's marriage and Arjuna's tapas. Surprisingly, four more *Mahābhārata* plays—"Draupadī the Gypsy," "The Marriage of Pavalakkoṭi," "The Fight over the Cattle Raid," and "Abhimanyu's Fight"—are copyrighted to Ammaṇi Ammaḷ with citation of their authors. Two others—"Eighteenth-Day War" and *Cayintava Nāṭakam* (about Jayadratha Saindhava's efforts to abduct Draupadī in the forest)—also have their authors cited, but they are copyrighted to T. A. Veṅkatēca Mutaliyār.²⁴ Only one Irattina Nāyakar *Mahābhārata* play, in fact, has not fallen to these copyrighting strategies, and that is "Dice Match and Disrobing." Its title page credits Irāmaccantira Kavirāyar alone. As another publisher has printed it the same way (see n. 18), it is presumably because it has come to be recognized as the work of this author.

What is most striking is that while Irattina Nāyakar had by 1867 already begun to publish "epic" dramas anonymously, Irāmaccantira Kavirāyar's plays on Draupadī's wedding and Arjuna's tapas had apparently not yet entered their list. The India Office Library holds author-recognized editions from 1875 and 1882 of "Arjuna's Tapas," and from 1874, 1875, 1877, and 1930 of "Draupadī's Marriage." A spot check of the 1875 edition of "Draupadī's Marriage" indicates that at the time of that printing, the play had no con-

23. Perumal (1981, 221–45) cites them by publisher as "Rettinānāyakar."

24. So, in the same series, is the drama *Keṅkaiyammaṇ Nāṭakam* by Kuruṣṇappillai, for which Perumal's list cites an 1891 edition. This drama is used at festivals to the village goddess Gangā or Keṅkai.

nection with Irattina Nāyakar. Still credited to Irāmaccantira Kavirāyar, the title page indicates that whatever was erroneous was corrected by a certain Cuppiramaṇṇiya Cuvāmi of Mayilam (probably the Mailam in Tindivanam Taluk with an important hilltop Murukan temple). This edition was published by the Mātava Nivāca Accukkūṭam (*accukkūṭam*, "printing place") by Muṇicāmi Mutaliyār, son of Cūlai Venkaṭācala Mutaliyār. Clearly this son is the same Muṇicāmi Mutaliyār whose wife, Ammaṇi Ammāl, came to hold the copyright of the bulk of the Irattina Nāyakar collection of *Mahābhārata* dramas. Indeed, he has the same "village name" as his father, Cūlai no doubt being the Choolai area of Madras City. When and how did this happen?

The current directors of Irattina Nāyakar and Sons, interviewed in 1984, claim to have kept no records on the formation of their drama collection and could recall nothing about Ammaṇi Ammāl, her husband, or any of the authors of their anonymous plays. But there is information on these plays from the India Office Library holdings and Perumal's list. Table 5 records (A) the anonymous titles of the Irattina Nāyakar *Mahābhārata* drama collection that are cited with authors in at least one of the two listings; (B) the cited authors; (C) the earliest dates indicated for the authored plays; and (D) the earliest dates for other plays—all different—on the same theme or episode. Except for the two Irāmaccantira Kavirāyar plays,

Table 5. Anonymous Irattina Nāyakar Titles with Traceable Authors

Play	Likely Author	Date	Other Similar Plays
1. <i>Vilvaḷaippu/</i> <i>Turōpatai</i> <i>Mālaiyīṭu</i>	Irāmaccantira Kavirāyar	1873	[1874]*
2. <i>Cupattirai</i> <i>Mālaiyīṭu</i>			1918 (2), n.d.
3. <i>Alli Nāṭakam</i>	V. Virapattira Nāyakar	1909	4 plays 1902–35
4. <i>Cuntari Mālaiyīṭu</i>	[Rākava Mūrtti]	[n.d.]	
5. <i>Irājacūya Yākam</i>	Cūlai Muṇicāmi Mutaliyār	1907	[1906]
6. <i>Cūtu Tuyilurital</i>	Irāmaccantira Kavirāyar	1857	[5 plays 1870–91]
7. <i>Arccuṇaṇ Tapacu</i>	Irāmaccantira Kavirāyar	1857	
8. <i>Turōpatai</i> <i>Kuṇṇavaṇci</i>	T. Taṇikācala Mutaliyār	1906	
9. <i>Kicaka Cammāram</i>		[1890]	[1897], 1912, 1915
10. <i>Kiruṣṇaṇ Tātu</i>	[Muṇicāmi Mutaliyār]	[1924]	[1897], 1917
11. <i>Aravāṇ Kaṭapali</i>	Cūlai Muṇicāmi Mutaliyār	1907/[1897]	
12. <i>Caṇintāvaṇ Caṇṭai</i>	C. Kiruṣṇacāmi Nāyakar	1911	
13. <i>Karṇa Moḷca</i>	M. Varatarāja Nāyakar	1910	1904, 1924

*Information from Perumal (1981, 221–45) is set in brackets.

The most striking thing about this list is that three of the anonymous titles in the Irattina Nāyakar *Mahābhārata* collection were attributed between 1907 and 1924 to Cūlai Muṇicāmi Mutaliyār. Indeed, the Irattina Nāyakar collection includes a total of five of his plays in all.²⁶ It is thus evident that Muṇicāmi Mutaliyār is a pivotal figure in the history of the publication of Terukkūttu dramas. As our table indicates, he is the author of three of the more important Draupadī cult plays, and he was also the proprietor of a press that published Irāmaccantira Kavirāyar's play about Draupadī's marriage. Now if Muṇicāmi Mutaliyār's wife holds the copyright of so many of these dramas, it would seem more than likely that the collection was originally made by Cūlai Muṇicāmi Mutaliyār himself during the period that he published and—if it was the same period—also contributed to the dramas that came to form the Irattina Nāyakar collection. We know that his active period as publisher includes the year 1875, and that his own plays continued to be published under his name as late as 1924 (in the case of *Kiruṣṇaṇ Tūtu*). Most likely he died sometime during this span and left the copyright to his wife. She appears to have continued to publish the dramas for some time before transferring the publishing rights to Irattina Nāyakar. Why so many of these plays became anonymous is uncertain, but one factor would seem to be an editorial process of abridgment such as one can discern in the two now anonymous plays of Irāmaccantira Kavirāyar.²⁷ It is possible that the abridgments are the work of Muṇicāmi Mutaliyār himself, or even of Ammaṇi Ammāl. But they may also have been the work of a forgotten Irattina Nāyakar editor.

It is plain that the process initiated by Muṇicāmi Mutaliyār and the Iratṭiṇa Nāyakar collection has had an impact upon the modern

25. As with *Mātupitī Caṇṭai*, *Apimannan Caṇṭai*, *Patinettāmpōr*, and *Pavalakkotī Mālai*; see bibliography for authors.

26. The two others attributed in the India Office Library catalog to Muṇicāmi Mutaliyār include one on Viṣṇu-Veṅkaṭeśvara of Tirupati (*Tirupativenkaṭēcapperumāl Nāṭakam*, 1909), and one on the Rāmāyaṇa (*Tāṭakaicammāra Nāṭakam*, 1911).

27. A check of the India Office Library's 1870s editions of Irāmacantira Kavirāyar's plays on Draupadī's marriage and Arjuna's tapas reveals that the now anonymous Irrattiṇa Nāyakar editions are clearly abridged through the shortening and omitting of both songs and prose passages and the occasional omission of lesser episodes.

reception of these dramas. As far as the collection's *Mahābhārata* dramas are concerned, they were no doubt originally brought together out of a core of plays that were performed at Draupadī festivals. Once these particular editions became widely accessible, they must have eclipsed other editions of the same plays, or works by other authors covering the same episodes. Indeed, as one can see from column D of table 5, the late nineteenth century, which saw the early publications of both Muṇicāmi Mutaliyār and Irattina Nāyakar, was clearly a boom period for the proliferation of such dramas by other authors and publishers as well. Especially noteworthy is the number of additional plays about the dice match and disrobing of Draupadī (5), Alli (4), Kīcaka (3), Subhadra (3), Karṇa (2), and "Kṛṣṇa the Messenger" (1). Also popular among the Draupadī festival drama subjects whose Irattina Nāyakar authors we do know were two other plays, one about the birth and youth of Kṛṣṇa and the other about Arjuna's marriage to Pavalakkoṭi, each of which was the subject of three additional dramas. This period also marks the extensive printing of dramas on the *Rāmāyaṇa* (which, as we have seen, can be performed at Māriyamman temples), on such folk ballad heroes as Maturai Viraṇ and the ever popular Rāja Desing,²⁸ and on other mythological and historically identifiable topics too numerous to mention.

The eventual concentration of the most accessible versions of the *Mahābhārata* dramas in the Irattina Nāyakar collection does not mean that it determined what was actually performed at Draupadī festivals. Each Terukkūttu troupe kept its own palm-leaf and eventually paper manuscripts, which were no doubt usually inspired by authors outside the Irattina Nāyakar collection, whether published or unpublished. But by having the greatest impact on what was available in print, the collection contributed to the transformation of this corpus into a largely anonymous folk literature.

The composition and publication of the majority of the dramas enacted in the Draupadī cult would thus seem to reflect changing concepts about the role of author and public, and to a certain extent, this has clearly influenced the Draupadī festival repertoire itself. But it is arguable that this literary output, important as it has been for my research, has probably not dramatically changed the basic performance character of the Terukkūttu. We have seen that some-

28. See Perumal 1981, 221–45, *passim*, and the summaries in Malten 1981, 31–33. Let us note that of the *Rāmāyaṇa* plays, there is no indication of any large proliferation of folk episodes like that in the second and fourth categories of *Mahābhārata* dramas cited at the beginning of this section.

thing bearing a family relationship to Draupadī festival Terukkūttu was performed in Dindigul before the earliest kujilik editions. Moreover, we have recognized that the printed dramas are but scaled-down versions of what is actually performed. With this in mind, let us look further into the relation between what is printed and what is performed.

Clearly, when dramas that last all night are reduced to forty to a hundred pages, much will be lost. One misses the impact of the music, the alternations between lull and intensity, the interactions with the audience, and the role of improvisation at every level. More particularly, one gets little sense of the Kaṭṭiyaṅkāraṇ, the irrepressible comic interlocutor who combines the classical drama role of the Vidūṣaka, in his buffoonish aspects (*pace* Kuiper 1977, 110–210), and the stage-managing involvements of the Sūtradhāra (Iyer 1966, 15; Subramanyam 1979, 13–14). In the printed dramas, the Kaṭṭiyaṅkāraṇ is rarely named as a character. Where his role is indicated, it is as nothing more than the “general voice” (*potu vacanam*), a “running commentator” who is given prose passages in which to recapitulate the action, provide background, and only occasionally exchange words with the principal characters. But on stage, he frequently dominates the dramas with his pacing of the action and his improvisational, and often ribald, humor (see Frasca 1984, 340–42, for examples from a recorded performance).

Most important, however, the printed plays provide next to no stage directions or indications as to the use of props. No doubt actors are expected to improvise and readers to use their imaginations. For anthropological purposes, this is the printed dramas' most serious limitation. It is not only that we are kept from appreciating the great and frequently brilliant improvisational skill with which scenes and episodes are interpreted from performance to performance and troupe to troupe. In leaving us in the dark about stage directions and props, the chapbook dramas deprive us of the very information that often bears most directly on the interrelation between the dramas and the ritual apparatus of the cult. In the most glaring instance, one can read “Arjuna's Tapas” without ever hearing of the *tapas maram*, the “tapas tree” that Arjuna must climb to perform his “penance.” In performance, it is very small things that count. It is a theater of the minimum. But whatever is used—cloth, flame, a mirror, a stick, sunglasses, or little children plucked from the audience—it is handled deftly, with stunning results and rich symbolic overtones.

Since I have neither been able to see all the plays nor find all of them in print, the following discussion will have an improvisational

character of its own. In describing each drama, I will indicate how my information on it was obtained. Generally, of the printed dramas, four ("Dice Match and Disrobing," "Draupadī the Gypsy," "Aravāṇ's Sacrifice," and "Pōrmannaṇ's Fight") were selected for study through translation, and the rest were studied in collaboration with readers.²⁹ Meanwhile, of the plays observed, some were seen in full, some in part, and some in shortened versions sponsored for my research and performed by the R. S. Natarajan Nāṭaka Capai of Pakkiriṭpālaiyam village. Aside from the sponsored plays, all the rest were observed in their festival settings. Given these varied conditions, I witnessed some of the plays more than once, performed by different troupes. Finally, for a few of the dramas I have had to rely on oral descriptions by my two main dramatist informants: R. S. Natarajan, the remarkably talented Vāṭṭiyār—"teacher" and in effect director—of the Pakkiriṭpālaiyam troupe, and his no less inspired brother, R. S. Mayakrishnan. These two brothers knew far more than the "maximum of ten to fifteen" Kūttus that Frasca defines as the repertoire limit of "even the greatest of Vāṭṭiyārs" (1984, 150). They were performing an eighteen-drama cycle when I first met them at Tindivanam in 1977, and I both saw them perform and heard them tell about many other dramas beside those eighteen.

In all, then, I will organize discussion around the thirty-two plays that I have found actually performed at Draupadī festivals. These are not the only dramas I will mention, but they are the only ones I will treat in any detail. The information, all gathered between 1975 and 1986 and shown in table 6, comes from twenty separate temples and twenty-five festival cycles, including three festivals at Tindivanam and two each at Mēlaccēri and Maṅkaḷam. It will be noticed that these three temples have varied their selections while retaining a basic outline from year to year. In table 6, the temple locations are listed from left to right in the descending order of the number of nights of dramas they sponsor. From top to bottom, the plays themselves are listed in their most appropriate epic narrative order, with the serial order of the plays performed at each festival listed under each separate location (one will note that at some festivals the normative order is not always fully followed).

It remains to say that some dramas will be treated more fully than others. One criterion is incidence of performance. There are

29. The translations were normally reviewed with Pon Kothandaraman. The readers were his then doctoral students and now colleagues, D. Murthy and N. Deivasundaram. My deep thanks for their help is matched only by my fond memories of their spirit of teamwork and encouragement.

Table 6. Draupadi Festival Drama Cycles

Festival Location	Marutātu	Tindivanam 1981	Tindivanam 1977	Tindivanam 1974	Ponūr	Kiḷkoṭṭunkālūr	Mēlaccēṇi 1982	Mēlaccēṇi 1977	Mankajam 1986	Māṇampāṭi	Karappattu	Kajampūr	Cempūr	Iluppakunam	Teynampet	Irukkal	Mēlcāttamanakajam	Mutikai Nallāṅkuppam	Entiūr	Mankajam 1982	Vellimēṭupēṭtai	Manakutaiaṇ	Cuddalore	Ciṇṇalai	China Salem
1.	<i>Kaṇṇaṇ Jalakirīṭtai, "Kṛṣṇa's Water Sports" (*)</i>																								
	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1					1					1	1						11
2.	<i>Yācālai, "The Sacrificial Hall" (V)</i>																								
	2				1	1							2												4
3.	<i>Aṛakkumālīkai, "The Lacquer House" (V*)</i>																								
	2	2	2	2																					3
4.	<i>Vitālaippu, "Bending of the Bow" (V*)</i>																								
	3	3			7				1	1		1	3	1	1		1	2				1	1		13
5.	<i>Turūpatai Mālaiyīṭu, "Draupadī's Marriage" (V*)</i>																								
	4	3	3		2	2					1									2	1	2	1	2x	13
6.	<i>Cupattirai Mālaiyīṭu, "Subhadra's Marriage" (V*)</i>																								
	4	5	5	5	4	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	4			2	2	3	3						18
7.	<i>Cittiraṅkaṇṇi Mālaiyīṭu, "Citrāṅgadā's Marriage" (V)</i>																								
	6				6	4	4																		5
8.	<i>Alli Mālaiyīṭu, "Alli's Marriage" (F*)</i>																								
	5	4			3	5	5																		6
9.	<i>Pavalakkōṭi Mālai, "Pavalakkōṭi's Marriage" (F*)</i>																								
	7				5	6	6																		5

(continued)

Table 6 continued

Festival Location	Marutāṭu	Tindivanam 1981	Tindivanam 1977	Tindivanam 1974	Ponṇūr	Kiḷkoṭṭunkalūr	Mēlaccēri 1982	Mēlaccēri 1977	Maṅkajam 1986	Māṇampāṭi	Kārappāṭu	Kajampūr	Cempūr	Iluppakunam	Teynampet	Iruṅkal	Melcattamanakajam	Mutikai Nallāṅkuppam	Entiyūr	Maṅkajam 1982	Veḷimēṇupēṭṭai	Maṇakutaiaṇ	Cuddalore	Ciṇvālai	China Salem		
10. Pōkavati Tirumaṇam, "Bhogavati's Marriage" (F)				4				4																		2	
11. Cuntari Mālaiyūṭu, "Cuntari's Marriage" (F*)																								2y		2	
12. Irājacūya Yākam, "Rājasūya Sacrifice" (V*)				6	6	6	8	7	3	3		3		2	2					4						11	
13. Cātu Tukilurital, "Dice Match and Disrobing" (V*)				9	7	7	7	9	7	8	4	4	5	3	3	3	3	3	4		2	4				1	20
14. Arccuṇaṇ Tapacu, "Arjuna's Tapas" (V*)				10	8	8	8	10	8	9	5	3	5	6	4	4	4	4	5	5	3	5		3		22	
15. Arccuṇaṇ Tēvappaṭṭam Peruṭal, "Arjuna Obtains a Divine Diadem" (V)				11	9	9																				3	
16. Caṇṭaravaṇ Paṇkam, "Humiliation of Saindhava" (V*)												6														1	
17. Turōṇṭai Kūṭavaṇci, "Draupadi the Gypsy" (F*)															5											2	
18. Kicaka Cammāram, "Slaughter of Kicaka" (V*)				12	10	10	9	10	12					5	6	5	5						3			2	15
19. Māṭupiti Cāṇṭai, "Fight over the Cattle Raid" (V*)				13	11	11	10	9	11	9	10	7	7	4						6	4	6	5	3			17

fourteen titles—actually thirteen plays, since *Vilvaḷaippu* and *Tur-ōpatai Mālaiyīṭu* are usually alternate titles—that recur nine times or more. Each of these plays will receive at least a brief summary. But my most basic criteria for close study are three: deepening of epic themes, folk variance from epic themes, and cultic significance. To a considerable extent, these criteria converge, for much of the deepening and variance are prompted by the cult.

In this light, before I turn to the Terukkūttu cycle itself, I must give an account of what often precedes it: the enactment as ritual drama of a singular *Mahābhārata* episode, not by the visiting performers of the itinerant Terukkūttu, but by a group of local non-professional village actors. This preparation for the Terukkūttu cycle by a local ritual drama has the most important lessons for understanding the Draupadī cult and its *Pāratam*.

8

The Death of Baka: Prelude to the Drama Cycle

Muttāl Rāvuttan̄ aside, our first taste of the Draupadī cult *Mahābhārata* takes us back to the distinction made by one of Frasca's Vāttiyār informants between Kūttu proper and Terukkūttu or street drama. In this case, our example does not come from the decentralized festival at Dindigul, where, if I am right, a full cycle of street dramas substituted for professional Kūttu in the early nineteenth century and has since been reduced to one such drama enacting the slaying of Kicaka. It comes from our core area itself and bears not so much a substitutionary relation to the Terukkūttu cycle as an introductory one, though with many shadings and variations. Nonetheless, it is essentially the same "street drama" style observed in Dindigul that is frequently used to present the singular episode of the slaying of the demon (Sanskrit *rākṣasa* and *asura*; Tamil *arakkaṇ*) Baka (Tamil *Pakaṇ* or *Pakācuraṇ*). We must now note how this episode is enacted and probe the rationale that sets it apart from others of the Terukkūttu cycle.

One can speak of an essentially introductory relation between the "Death of Baka" and the Terukkūttu *Pāratam* cycle because the latter usually begins with a play about Draupadī's wedding, an episode that in the *Mahābhārata* itself occurs almost directly after the killing of Baka.¹ The epic narrative thus provides its own pointers to an intriguing link between these two episodes, one that can be underscored by the pāratiyārs, when they combine both episodes into one title for an afternoon's Piracaṅkam (as mentioned in chap. 7, n. 10). But it is the treatment of these episodes as two different types of drama—the one street drama, the other Kūttu—that will allow us to bring out the logic of the narrative connection.

1. See chap. 7, sec. C, and table 6, showing how frequently the wedding plays (4 and 5) occur first in the drama cycle. I will examine exceptions in chapter 9, but note for now that strictly speaking, the principal exception, play 1, is not *Pāratam*.

As Frasca (1984, 286–88) has noted, generalizing on the case of Iruṅkal, it is not uncommon for two members of the visiting Terukkūttu troupe to enact the “Death of Baka” on the afternoon of the evening on which the troupe begins its full-scale cycle with a drama about the marriage of Draupadī. Though I have found no site where things transpired precisely in this manner, my two main dramatist informants described exactly the same practice as Frasca. But they indicated that they only performed the “Death of Baka” very rarely, at villages where there was a special request for them to do so. It is significant that where the dramatists participate, they do so primarily in a style that conforms, not to the canons of their professional drama, but to what one of my informants called the “old style” of village street drama.

In other words, in the cases where the itinerant Terukkūttu actors take part in the “Death of Baka,” their performance replicates a local ritual street drama. Presumably, where they are asked to perform this scene, it is because they do it better than local village actors, or because there are no local actors to perform it. But we do know that the “Death of Baka” is quite commonly performed by villagers. At some festivals, they enact the scene before the Terukkūttu troupe arrives: thirteen days before at Maṅkaḷam, ten days before at Kīlkoṭuṅkālūr. It is also performed by local actors at certain festivals—Chinna Salem, Virapāṇṭi, Pūṇamalli, Pondicherry (see Shideler 1987, 139–40)—that at least currently do entirely without professional Terukkūttu in their festivals.²

Most significant, however, the “Death of Baka” is the only *Maḥābhārata* episode to figure consistently as a village ritual street drama of this type and to resist more normative dramatic treatment as part of the Terukkūttu repertoire. There are other episodes that have both nighttime drama and daytime ritual enactment. Thus at Kārvēṭinagaram, Reddy (1985, 11) found that “besides the performances at night, four episodes are enacted in the afternoon on different days”: the death of Baka, Arjuna’s penance, Arjuna’s release of the cattle after the fight over the cattle raid, and the killing of Duḥśāsana and Duryodhana. As we shall see in our study of Draupadī cult rituals, the last three episodes are frequently performed twice at one and the same festival, both as local ritual and as staged Terukkūttu. The same situation is also found in the case

2. On Chinna Salem, see table 6, legend; the last Pūṇamalli festival in 1977 was performed without Terukkūttu, but previously it was included; At Virapāṇṭi, the “Death of Baka” is “old style” Kūttu, and the only drama that has been performed there within memory.

of "Aravān's Sacrifice." Similarly, while there is no record of both being performed at one festival, the burning of the lacquer house has been found both as local ritual directly preceding the "Death of Baka" (see Frasca 1984, 285–86; Shideler 1987, 136–40) and as a performed drama (table 6, no. 3) with a Irattiṇa Nāyakar chapbook edition. Thus it is only the "Death of Baka" that is consistently performed as local ritual drama without adaptation to the Terukkūttu stage.³ It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the "Death of Baka" receives its fullest and most persisting significance in the Draupadī cult's *Mahābhārata* as the exemplar of village ritual street drama.

As my primary concern is with the mythology of this episode, I will treat its festival performance only briefly. Since I have not seen it enacted, I draw primarily on Frasca's account (1984, 276–77), which describes a ritual quite similar to what I have heard of from informants, most notably at Maṅkaḷam. The enactment always requires two actors, one representing Bhīma in Brahman disguise, and the other the demon Baka. At Iruṅkal, Frasca found that the actor representing Bhīma, disguised as a Brahman, sits on a bullock cart beside the temple's processional Bhīma icon (the icon is a feature I have not met elsewhere), while the Baka actor cavorts about the cart demonically, leaping, jumping, and screaming. The cart follows a music band (*mēḷam*) around the village, stopping at houses to receive offerings of rice and sweets that are given to Bhīma to constitute his tribute to Baka. When the two return to the vicinity of the Draupadī temple, Bhīma taunts Baka by eating the food rather than giving it to him. Local informants at Maṅkaḷam fill out this scene with additional details. The rice on the cart is only a thin layer over a pile of sand, Bhīma eating the former and leaving Baka the latter, to his disgust. Bhīma awes Baka with his strength and anger by uprooting a banyan tree for Baka to use for his toothpick and diverting a stream with his leg for Baka to slake his thirst. Outraged by these humiliations, Baka attacks Bhīma and is killed. The bullock cart for the rice and the venue of the Draupadī

3. The Pakka in *Pakkācuran̄ Caṇṭai*, listed in table 6, item 20, as the eleventh play performed at Poṇṇūr, is a variant spelling I have found elsewhere for Baka-Paka, and is surely a reference to a drama of some sort. The information, from an answer to my questionnaire, does not clarify how the drama was performed or why it was listed in such an unexpected place in the cycle. It is the only counterevidence I have found to my generalization. Also, in festivals that include Terukkūttu dramas on episodes that narratively precede the "Death of Baka" ("The Sacrificial Hall" and "The Lacquer House", table 6, plays 2 and 3), there is no case where the "Death of Baka" comes as part of the cycle between them and Draupadī's marriage.

temple for the closing fight (*caṇṭai*) were mentioned at all the sites where I inquired into the performance of this episode (Chinna Salem, Maṅkaḷam, Virapāṇṭi, Pūṇamalli).

The myth, however, takes us far beyond what is observable in these rites. But to appreciate the episode's flavor as village ritual drama, one must address the story's transformations. Thus even though it is Villiputtūr's and Nallāppillai's classical Tamil *Pāratams* that tie in most directly with the folk versions of the story, one must also reckon with certain features of the Sanskrit account, features that the Tamil versions omit or change, but by transforming rather than eliminating their symbolism. Moreover, on certain points, the closest literary account to the village versions of the story comes, not from the classical Tamil *Pāratams*, but from the "prose Nallāppillai" of Caṇmukakkavirāyar (1969). I will use this quite magnificent and often extremely vivid retelling of the epic only sparingly, as I am uncertain whether its author wrote from any familiarity with the Draupadī cult. But on the Baka episode, its evidence cannot be ignored, and what is said about Caṇmukakkavirāyar by B. A. Pālacuppiramaṇiyam in his introduction to the 1969 Irattīṇa Nāyakar edition of this work—that Caṇmukakkavirāyar flourished around 1890 and was a man of great skill (*makā camarttar*) in the art of Piracāṅkam—certainly suggests that the Draupadī cult was somewhere on his horizons. All this is, of course, to register the daunting fact that to unravel the Draupadī cult's *Mahābhārata*, one must sometimes take the variants that have shaped it in layers. Although my usual procedure will be to begin with the folk versions of the epic episodes, noting classical Tamil or Sanskrit sources only where one or the other has been significantly transformed, in the case of the "Death of Baka" it is best to begin with a brief account of the story from the Sanskrit.

After their escape from the lacquer house and the marriage of Bhīma to the Rākṣasī Hīḍimbā, the Pāṇḍavas and their mother, Kuntī, don the guise of Brahman ascetics (*Mbh.* 144.3–5) and take up residence in the town of Ekacakrā—"The Single Wheel"—in the household of a Brahman. There they learn that the town has fallen prey to a protection racket run by the demon Baka, who lords it over the country, city, and region (148.5–6) while a "weak" and "bad" king (*durbala . . . kurājan*) stands by impotently at a place called Vetrakīyagrha, "The Home of the Place of Reeds" (148.9–10).⁴ Each day of the year, a different family must supply Baka,

4. Alternatively, "the place rich in reeds," or "whose houses are made of reeds," or "in the middle of reeds" (Biardeau and Peterfalvi 1985, 148).

who dwells in the forest outside Ekacakrā (152.17), with “a cartload of rice, two buffaloes [*mahiṣau*], and the one human who brings them” (148.6). Hearing that it is now the turn of their host family to commit one of its own members to Baka’s voracious jaws, Kuntī volunteers Bhīma to be the food-bringer. The next day Bhīma—who is of course still disguised as a Brahman—sets off with the food, but before delivering it he starts eating it himself. This infuriates the “man eater” (151.1), who rushes Bhīma and is soon broken in two (151.22–23). Bhīma then warns Baka’s kinsmen to cease their man-eating in the area and leaves Baka’s corpse at the Ekacakrā town gate (152.3,6). The rescued Brahman host announces that his family and the town have been saved by a “powerful Brahman, perfected in spells” (*mantrasiddhaḥ*; 152.14), and the people of all four castes, delighted, gather to institute a *brahmamaha*, a festival in honor of Brahmans (152.18).

As regards the Tamil versions of this episode, the changes that concern us fall under two headings: those involving the locations of the action, and those involving the nature of Baka’s appeasement. In the Villi and Nallāppillai *Pāratams* (the latter does little more with the Baka episode than repeat the former), the Hiḍimbā and Baka stories are combined into a single *Vēttirakīyaccarukkam*, “Vetrakīya Chapter.” The locations of Vetrakīya and Ekacakrā have in effect been reversed. Vetrakīya is no longer a shadowy “reedy place” ruled by an anonymous feeble king. It is the name of the “great city” (*mā nakari*; Villi 1.4.33; Nallāppillai 1.19.43) from which Baka claims his tribute; and, since no royal seat by that name is mentioned either in this city or outside of it, it is the only known “population center” in the region. Moreover, the king of Vetrakīya disappears from the story. Meanwhile, Ekacakrā has become the name for the forest outside of this city, the Ekacakkaravaṇam, or “Ekacakra Forest” (Villi 1.4.63; Nallāppillai 1.19.76). Along with the “Hiḍimba Forest” (*iṭimpavaṇam*), in which Bhīma marries Hiḍimbā, it becomes one of two Rākṣasa-infested forests in the city’s environs. In addition, not only does this “great city of Vetrakīya” lack a king, but one hears nothing of its four castes instituting a Brahman festival. Indeed, one hears nothing about any other caste than its Brahmans, who are repeatedly called *muṇis*, or “sages,” so that by the end of the episode one hears of Vetrakīya as a city of “great munis” (*māmuṇivar*; Villi 1.4.63; Nallāppillai 1.19.76).

This new sociology can be clarified, however, by the “prose Nallāppillai” of Caṇmukakkavirāyar, which identifies this Brahman town as an *akkarāram* (Sanskrit *agrahāram*), a variety of settlement within the general category so important to the history of South

India, the *brahmadeya*: that is, the village or land donated by a king for the settlement of Brahmins (see Stein 1980, 141–72). But with the clarification, Caṇṇukakkavirāyareshapes the story further. As in the Sanskrit epic, Vetrakīya is once again described as the larger area (though still with no royal resident). The agrahāram “village” (*kirāmaṃ*)—it is thus no longer a great city—is given the new name of Munnurūmaṇkaḷam, “The Village of the Three Hundred,” which is precisely the name by which the village is known in local Draupadī cult narratives. The “Ekacakrā Forest” remains from Villi and Nallāppillai as the forest that was cleared for the building of the agrahāram. We hear nothing of the king who presumably donated the land, only that once the agrahāram was inhabited, Baka made his invasion, every day looting the village and eating cows, goats, and Brahmins until the latter finally made their pact with him. If he will only stop these depredations, they will treat him as their Kulateyvam, or lineage deity, and the three hundred and forty households of the village will henceforth sate him daily, by rotation, with a huge supply of rice and a human sacrifice, or *narapali* (Caṇṇukakkavirāyareshapes 1969, 1: 277–78).

This brings us, then, to the second heading under which we must review the different versions of Baka’s demands. Let us recall that in the Sanskrit epic the “price” (*vetanam*) that Baka sets is a cartload of rice, a human, and two buffaloes. It is clear that he eats the rice, and understood that he eats the human. Indeed, the Sanskrit epic characterizes him as a “man-eater” (*puruṣādaka*; e.g., *Mbh.* 1.147.22; 148.4) and holds up this habit as his most egregious trait. But it is unclear whether he eats the two buffaloes or just requires them to haul the cartload of rice. It is probably only the latter. In any case, the buffaloes are certainly not eaten by Bhīma when he tucks into Baka’s meal. On these issues, the Tamil sources are rich in variations.

First of all, it is clear already from the “prose Nallāppillai” that Baka is deplored not so much for eating humans as for causing human sacrifices. This revised emphasis is consistent through all our accounts, from Villi (1.5.42; Nallāppillai 1.19.52) to the Draupadī cult. In the literary versions, at least, Bhīma must prepare himself as a human sacrifice by wearing red. In Villi (1.5.49; Nallāppillai 1.19.62), he covers himself with a red ointment. And the “prose Nallāppillai” has the imperiled Brahmin householder whom Bhīma saves describe him—he is decorated with red flowers—as a “black” or “dark” Brahmin (*kariya pirāmaṇaṇ*) about to appear to Baka in the form of Yama, the god of death (Caṇṇukakkavirāyareshapes 1969, 1: 282). Unfortunately, I obtained no information as to whether

this wearing of red is part of Bhīma's makeup in the Draupadī cult street dramatizations.

As to the buffaloes, Villi (1.5.50; Nallāppillai 1.19.63) seems to be attempting to clear matters up by having them straightforwardly hitched to the rice cart. These draft animals are certainly the only ones he mentions, though since he uses the ambiguous term *pakaṭu*, one cannot be sure whether he regards them as buffaloes or bulls (the commentator Rājakōpālāccāriyār's suggestion). The "prose Nallāppillai" also leaves it unlikely that Baka eats the animals, though it does remind us that before he was appeased, he ate goats, bulls, and Brahmans. But this text does introduce a marvelous hyperbole in making clear that the draft animals are buffaloes. It takes no ordinary cartload of rice to satiate Baka, but one drawn by fifty teams (*ēr*) of male buffaloes (*erumaik kaṭākkal*; Caṇmukakkavirāyar 1969, 1: 282).

On this point, however, two Draupadī cult sources have supplied versions that make clear the full extent of Baka's gluttony. Local Maṅkaḷam informants insist that every day Baka must be fed a cartload of rice, two he-buffaloes (*erumaik kaṭā*), and one human. According to the local informants at Chinna Salem, Baka demands twenty-four *kalams* (measures) of rice, one he-buffalo, one he-goat (*āṭṭuk kaṭā*), and the cart driver who brings them. Here, in addition, the rice cart is drawn by bullocks, relieving the one buffalo and companion goat of this charge, and making it even more pointed that they join the human and the rice as parts of Baka's "food" or "meal" (*cāppāṭu*). Moreover, in these and other Draupadī cult accounts, it was stated that Baka always eats the human offering first. It seems to be his custom to go on after this first delicacy to eat the rest of his fare of animal flesh and rice, and that his losing fight with Bhīma, after the latter has dipped only into the mound of rice, simply prevents the completion of such a dinner.

The addition of the goat in the Chinna Salem version is most telling. Clearly the goat and the buffalo would make an incongruous pair of draft animals: incongruous though not inconceivable, I must add, since the Pakkiriṭṭaiyāy troupe, in recalling the episode during their performance of "Draupadī's Marriage," tells the audience that Baka demanded that the goat and buffalo first pull the cart together and then form part of his meal. Here in the drama, without ritual enactment, the incongruity is played for laughs. But the Chinna Salem ritual solves the problem by replacing the unlikely pair of draft animals with the two bullocks. Yet the combination of the buffalo, goat, and mound of rice has a precise ritual explanation. As we shall see in chapters 16 and 17, it is an idiom

of the cult and mythology of Pōttu Rāja, the “Buffalo King”—one that in some cases is linked directly with South Indian village buffalo sacrifices. It is the goat whose neck is bitten in a distinctly “Rākṣasic” ritual fashion at many such occasions. Moreover, *erumaik kaṭā* and *āṭṭuk kaṭā* are the Tamil terms for the he-buffalo and he-goat that are offered in such village rites.

The devouring of the buffaloes as part of Baka’s meal is thus a “potential” of this story that is fulfilled in Draupadī cult folk versions, and that would seem to have been in some fashion evoked in earlier classical versions as well, including the Sanskrit.⁵ The ubiquitousness of the buffaloes in the different versions of this story would seem to have a consistent significance in relation to the extreme offering—not merely of a human but of a Brahman—that Baka receives. Indeed, one could argue that whether Baka eats the buffaloes or not, their place in the story is part of a wider evocation of the monstrosity of the village sacrifice he demands. It is a daily sacrifice in which the victims and offerers are Brahmans, rather than what would be more normal in village circumstances: a seasonal (normally yearly) sacrifice in which the chief victims are buffaloes, and in which Brahmans generally shun the impure rites, leaving officiants of low castes to play the leading ceremonial roles. Indeed, the very association of Brahmans with buffaloes in this story is startling, for the Brahman’s usual animal complement and companion is of course not the impure male buffalo but its effective symbolic opposite, the pure and ever-to-be-protected cow.

It is, of course, undemonstrable that it is actual village buffalo sacrifices that are evoked in the Sanskrit epic. One cannot document village buffalo sacrifices from the period usually assigned to the epic’s composition. But neither can one document “village” human sacrifices from that period, something that the Baka story describes explicitly. It is tempting to remember that in the ideal case, humans and buffaloes are interchangeable as sacrifices to the goddess, and that the ideal victim is none other than a composite of the two, the humanized buffalo Mahiṣāśura.⁶ But one cannot make such comparative data contemporary with the Sanskrit epic.

5. I read Biardeau and Peterfalvi 1985 after writing this, but I note that Biardeau not only views Bhīma’s manner of killing Baka as an evocation of the goddess and the Buffalo Demon, but remarks: “Two buffaloes figure in the cannibal’s [regular daily] meal, but it is Bhīma who in fact devours them” (ibid. 143, my translation). To me, this is still uncertain.

6. See Hildebeitel, 1978, 780–83, with citations. Recall also the *bali-piṭham* at the Gingee Kamalakkanni temple, with its incised heads of a buffalo, ram, and four humans (chap. 4, sec. B), and the substitution of buffalo victims for human victims by the Kondhs (Thurston and Rangachari 1904, 3: 371).

This conclusion can, however, be reasonably drawn: when the Sanskrit epic closes the episode with the institution of the "Brahman festival" that follows Baka's killing, it makes for the restoration of a classical "Sanskritic" village order, with all four castes participating, that sets right the sacrificial values Baka's reign of terror had upended.

But what, after all, has all this to do with introducing the Draupadī cult's cycle of epic plays? Since our basic concern is with this story's performance as village street drama, let us begin with what becomes of the village and its environs. I start with the situation as it is defined in the Sanskrit epic, essentially following the insights of Biardeau.

For the Pāṇḍavas, the town of Ekacakrā, "One Wheel," no doubt symbolizes the one wheel of sovereignty that they must regain after marrying Draupadī and restoring unity to the kingdom they will soon have to divide with the Kauravas (Biardeau 1978, 100). This town is in a realm whose "weak" and "bad" king rules from the "reedy place" of Vetrakīya, the king whose misrule leaves the town to the depredations of Baka. This configuration can hardly be fortuitous. The "reedy place" evokes the impure marshy regions (the *anūpa*) of the classical Indian landscape, the symbolic opposite and complement to the dry "jungle" (*jāṅgala*) or "savanna" terrain of the black antelope, which is coextensive with Brahmanical culture and marks "the domain of the Ārya" and the land suitable for Vedic sacrifice (see Zimmermann 1982, 69–77, 87). Furthermore, the name Baka means "Crane." Now the crane is of course a waterfowl of marshy terrain, and it is inevitable that one senses a correspondence between the "badness" of this king of the marshes and the ascendancy of a waterfowl demon. Indeed, one may further suspect that the association of the Brahmins of Ekacakrā with the water buffalo, that fatty and phlegmatic animal of the marshes (ibid., 15, 107, 207), springs from the same symbolic milieu. Moreover, as Biardeau has shown, in the *Mahābhārata* the crane and the heron (*kaṅka*) carry the heavy symbolic load of being impure eaters of raw and dead flesh, even joining other predators on the battlefield to consume the corpses of the slain. Their preeminence registers a return to chaos, a sign that the social order has fallen prey to the "law of the fishes"—the *matsya nyāya*—in which, without a good and strong king to wield the royal staff of chastisement (the *daṇḍa*), "the big fish eat the little fish."⁷

7. For her main discussion of these themes, including the interpretation of the name Kaṅka, "Heron," which Yudhiṣṭhira assumes during his year in disguise as a Brahman, and his father Dharma's appearance in the form of a *baka*, see Biardeau 1978, 94–101; Biardeau and Peterfalvi 1985, 142–44, 147–49.

Now it would seem that all this has changed in the Tamil versions. In Villi and Nallāppillai, Ekacakrā becomes the forest surrounding Vetrakīya, while Vetrakīya becomes the “great city” of Brahman munis terrorized by Baka. Indeed, it is not clear whether we should suppose that Ekacakrā “town” has simply disappeared, and the action of the story been moved to the capital of the “place of reeds,” or that the Vetrakīya “capital” has disappeared, leaving that name to be reapplied to Ekacakrā. Whatever has happened in this regard, there is only one “city” of Vetrakīya, and it is now dominated by Brahmins and without its impotent king. From here we have further followed the short step to the “prose Nallāppillai” and the folklore of the Draupadī cult, in which this one location becomes the Brahman agrahāram of Munnurumāṅkaḷam, “The Village of the Three Hundred.”

Yet in certain regards the difference is perhaps more apparent than real. With the disappearance of the shadowy unnamed king, the theme of royal weakness and incompetence is now focused directly on the Pāṇḍavas. Just as this weak king supposedly yields his realm to the Rākṣasa Baka, so the Pāṇḍavas have temporarily yielded the staff of sovereignty to the Kauravas—a hundred Rākṣasas born among men (*Mbh.* 1.61.82–83)—and have entered Vetrakīya city, or “The Village of the Three Hundred,” in the guise of weak Brahmins. There, however, they are called upon, through Bhīma, to reveal that they are in fact strong and good Kṣatriya kings who are able to protect the Brahmins of this city or village even while retaining their own Brahman disguises.

The key figure is, of course, Baka, and here again Biardeau provides the telling insight. Baka is not just a Rākṣasa but a Brahmarākṣasa. To make this point, however, Biardeau has had to reconstruct the Brahmarākṣasa as an ideal type, for the epic never identifies Baka in this precise way. Indeed, it never even makes him a Brahman, though it does evoke affinities between Rākṣasas and Brahmins in certain other narrative settings where Rākṣasas disguise themselves as Brahmins in order to wreak their usual havoc.⁸ As Biardeau has put it most succinctly, “these cannibals

8. In connection with the rākṣasic behavior of Bhīma, see Gitomer 1985: Jaṭāsura disguises himself as a Brahman expert in the arts and spells of weapons, while seeking *inter alia* to avenge the death of Baka (*Mbh.* 3.154); Carvaka, disguised as a Brahman, tries to disrupt Yudhiṣṭhira’s postwar return to Hāstinapura, and is burnt on the spot by the *tejas* (fiery spiritual power) of the attendant Brahmins (12.39.22–33). But the most famous Rākṣasa to disguise himself as a Brahman, and thus reveal his true “hidden” Brahmarākṣasa nature, is Rāvaṇa, when he comes to abduct Sītā.

are indeed the monsters whom one must destroy, but they are engendered mythically by the disorder which men allow to sow itself in their own society. They are 'Brahmans' who reign when the Kṣatriyas default. And since they are not qualified to rule, . . . their reign is a time of catastrophes."⁹ This typological definition thus goes beyond the usual—and no doubt quite ancient—folkloric notion that the Brahmarākṣasa is the spirit or reincarnation of a Brahman who died without fulfilling his wishes, or who died disastrously by murder or suicide.¹⁰ But it also contextualizes that explanation: whatever their karmic history, Brahmarākṣasas arise where weak kings leave the dharma imperiled. Moreover, though it is perfectly logical and indeed highly significant (see chaps. 18–19) that this "karmic" explanation can be invoked, it must be supplemented by a "genetic" explanation that accounts for the general class of Brahmarākṣasas. Surprising as it may be, all Rākṣasas are Brahmans in that they are descended from the Brahman sage Pulastya, one of the mind-born sons of Brahmā. This fact is made far more of in the *Rāmāyaṇa* where Rāvaṇa and all his Rākṣasa ilk are Brahmans, than it is in the *Mahābhārata*. But the principle applies in both of the Sanskrit epics (see Hopkins [1915] 1969, 189–91). Indeed, the precise term that twice describes the Kauravas as a hundred Rākṣasas born among men is *paulastyāḥ*, "descendants of Pulastya" (*Mbh.* 1.61.82–83).

Against the background of misrule of the weak king of Vetrakīyagṛha, Baka thus figures as the prototype of such Brahmarākṣasas within the *Mahābhārata*. It is Baka who is repeatedly referred to as either a friend or kinsman of nearly every major Rākṣasa in the classical epic, providing a family tree that we shall see enlarged in the epic mythology of the Draupadī cult.¹¹ It is precisely this classical symbolic configuration as a whole that the Draupadī cult confirms, reshapes,

9. CR 87, 148–49 (my translation); cf. 1978, 100; CR 88, 181; 1985a, 28, 30–31.

10. See Oppert 1893, 298; Crooke [1896] 1968, 78–79 (they are black, wear entrails, eat animals, gnaw flesh of human heads, and drink blood from skulls); Meyer 1984, 182, 207–8; Coccari 1986, 38, 68–71: Brahman Bābās and Brahmarākṣasas around Banaras are "powerful ghosts of Brahman who have met with untimely deaths," often by murder or suicide. The Sanskrit epics also know Brahmarākṣasas as "priests reborn as Rākṣasas" (Hopkins [1915] 1969, 44). Cf. also *Mbh.* 9.24.16–17: those who hate Brahman from among the lower castes become Brahmarākṣasas.

11. He is a brother of Alambuṣa (6.68.45; 7.83.23), Kirmīra (3.12.22), and Alāyudha (7.153.4), a friend (*sakhi*) of Hiḍimba (7.151.3ff., mentioned along with these other "kinsmen," *jñātis*, all of whom Alāyudha seeks to avenge against Bhīma and his son Ghaṭotkaca), and the one whose "path" (*mārga*) Jaṭāsura follows to his death at Bhīma's hands (3.154.36). On other kinsmen of Baka in the Draupadī cult's epic, see chap. 5, sec. B, chap. 13, sec. A, and chap. 15.

and transplants. We have seen how the Tamil tradition increasingly emphasizes the Brahmandom of the inhabitants of Vetrakīya-Munnurumaṅkaḷam. What finally also becomes clear, though only in the Draupadī cult, is that Baka is a Brahman too. At Chinna Salem he is in fact called Maṅkaḷattu Muṇivar—explained as “the Muni from (Munnurru) maṅkaḷam”—and the ritual drama that enacts his death is called *Maṅkaḷattu Muṇi Camhāram*, “The Destruction of Maṅkaḷattu Muni.” With no king to protect the Brahman village, it falls prey to a “Brahman” who devours his own kind, like the fish that a “crane” should normally eat. In this context, one also gains a better sense of what is implied when the Tamil versions attribute the symbolism of defaulted kingship to the Pāṇḍavas rather than to the Vetrakīya Rāja. For the Pāṇḍavas to restore the dharma to this Brahman town or village, not only must they reveal their Kṣatriya prowess through their disguises as Brahmins, but Bhīma in particular must counteract the depredations of a “true” Brahmarākṣasa by meeting Baka on his own terms: that is, by gorging his food, smearing his body with red, fighting hand to hand, in short, unveiling his own Brahmarākṣasa dimension.

This is not the only place to notice Bhīma’s affinities with Rākṣasas, who, once pacified and “converted,” are frequently found in the position of “protectors” or “guardians” (from the Sanskrit root *rakṣ*, “to protect”). Indeed, the sun god Sūrya will supply Draupadī with a Rākṣasa to guard her during her period in disguise (*Mbh.* 4.14.19–20), the very year—by way of compensation—she cannot expect the customary protection of Bhīma.¹² But what is most important for our purposes is that the mythology of the Draupadī cult replays this Brahmarākṣasa scenario with astonishing precision in its mythology of Gingee. There, as if in confirmation that it is the Pāṇḍavas who replace the Vetrakīya Rāja as the weak king, it is usually their descendant Cunītaṅ who becomes the weak king of Gingee. Likewise, it is usually Rocakaṅ-Acalammācuraṅ, Baka’s descendant, who sows Brahmarākṣasic havoc. And it is Draupadī and Pōttu Rāja—two figures whose own Rākṣasic, and in Pōttu Rāja’s case Brahmarākṣasic, traits will not fail to impress us (see chaps. 13, 16–17)—who, like Bhīma, come to the aid and rescue of the weak king and his cherished kingdom. Indeed, let us note that one variant of the “Cunītaṅ cycle” develops this story even further in the direction of the Tamil versions of the “Death of Baka.” In Kothandarama Goundar’s version, there is no weak king: like

12. See also Gitomer 1985, who develops this theme further in relation to Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇa’s *Veṇiśaṃhāra*.

Baka with the king of Vetrakīya, the Arakkaṇ (Demon) of the Gingee Fort has expelled him from the story, taking on the royal function in "typical" Brahmarākṣasa fashion. Thus, rather than Cuniṭaṇ performing the sacrifice to bring about Draupadī's second birth, or the Pāṇḍavas performing it on his behalf (Terukkūttu version), the redeeming task falls to certain Gingee area muṇis who are left to their own devices like the muṇis of "The Village of the Three Hundred."

When the organizers of South Indian Draupadī festivals set the stage for a cycle of professional Terukkūttu dramas by first sponsoring a local amateur, or in any case street drama, performance of the "Death of Baka," it is thus clear that the accent is on the village character of the mythic episode. Through this ritual drama, the village itself becomes the scene of a double evocation. On the one hand, it identifies the festival village with Munnurṛumaṇkaḷam, the Brahman agrahāram saved by Kuntī and Bhīma. On the other, it establishes it as a multiform of the capital of the kingdom of Gingee, saved by Draupadī and Pōttu Rāja. Moreover, it is the isomorphism of these two transposed "village mythologies" that finally exposes the sequential connection between the village street drama of the "Death of Baka" and the full-scale cycle of *Mahābhārata* dramas that follows it. At Gingee, the killing of Baka's descendant accounts directly for the advent of Draupadī. At Munnurṛumaṇkaḷam, the drama that the "Death of Baka" usually sets the stage for portrays the marriage of Draupadī, bringing the epic Draupadī "in person" for the first time onto the village Terukkūttu stage. In both cases, the advent of the goddess is linked with the the killing of a Brahmarākṣasa, a mythic killing with sacrificial overtones that are indeed clearest in the village enactment. Moreover, if I am on the right track in proposing that Baka's descendant is the "Protector of Goats" whose last head comes to be held by the "Buffalo King" (see chap. 5, sec. B), we find the very same sacrificial idioms re-worked and reinforced in the Draupadī cult interpretation of the death of Baka. In that episode, the killing of the demon is itself the rectification of the more monstrous village sacrifice that Baka demanded: the daily offering of a mound of rice and a human victim in varied, often ambiguous, combinations with the buffalo, and sometimes with the goat.

In this light, let me pose just one last thought. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, there are two sacrificially marked episodes that precipitate Rāma's entrées to Sītā. In the first, before marrying her, he must kill the Brahmarākṣasī Tāṭakā. In the second, in order to regain her after she has been abducted by the Brahmarākṣasa Rāvaṇa, he must ally

himself with the monkeys by implicating himself, however remotely, in the repercussions of a village-style buffalo sacrifice (see Hildebeitel 1980a, 200–211). Similarly, the Pāṇḍavas' union with Draupadī is precipitated by the killing of Baka. It would seem that the Draupadī cult acts on and enriches a scenario implied in both of the Sanskrit epics: the goddess-heroine responds to those who have come to understand the benefits of such village rites.

9

For Openers: Beginning the Terukkūttu Cycle

Although I have treated the "Death of Baka" from the vantage point of an ideal case, in which a drama on Draupadī's marriage would follow it directly, in actual festival contexts matters are considerably more varied. As was noted in chapter 8, village street drama performances of the "Death of Baka" are not that common. When one looks to the nightlong professional dramas, one finds that any one of four titles may be selected to introduce the *Mahābhārata* cycle of plays: *Jalakkiriṭai*, *Yākacālai*, *Vilvaḷaippu*, and *Turōpatai Mālaiyīṭu*. The last two actually embrace the one topic of the marriage of Draupadī, and either of them may cover the basic content of the marriage when only one marriage drama is performed. There are thus actually three themes that may serve for openers: Kṛṣṇa's "water sports," the title and subject of the first play; Draupadī's birth, the culmination of the second; and Draupadī's marriage, the incident central to both the third and the fourth.

There are clear distinctions that influence where each of the three will be selected to open the cycle. "Kṛṣṇa's Water Sports" is generally selected at temples where the cycle is longest, and a drama on Draupadī's marriage when it is shortest. *Yākacālai* tends to appear in the same longer cycles with *Jalakkiriṭai*, sometimes coming before it and sometimes immediately after it. And the marriage plays occur virtually everywhere, whether they are first or not. In this chapter, I will treat these four plays and three themes together. But the performances of Draupadī's marriage will receive the most attention, since they are the most indispensable to the continuity of the festival.

A. Kaṇṇan Jalakkirītai, "Kṛṣṇa's Water Sports"

I begin with *Jalakkirītai* because it serves widely as an introductory play,¹ and it was in particular the choice for this opening slot at Mēlaccēri and Tindivanam. The fact that it regularly opens (or occurs second) in the longer cycles is an indication that the play has a special appeal for the more ambitious temples. The reason for this is not hard to find. The play is not *Mahābhārata*; it enacts the story of Kṛṣṇa from birth to youth. Yet in a wider sense it is *Mahābhārata*. It stands in a similar relation to the *Bhārata* dramas as the *Harivaṃśa*—the first text to tell of Kṛṣṇa's youth—to the classical Sanskrit epic. To be sure, the *Harivaṃśa* is an appendix or supplement (*khila*) to the *Mahābhārata*, a reputed afterthought of the author Vyāsa, and *Jalakkirītai* is an introduction. But otherwise the correspondence is exact, even to the extent of regarding *Jalakkirītai* as a supplement. At Tindivanam and Marutāṭu, it is counted separately from the eighteen dramas that constitute the *Pāratam* cycle as such,² just as the *Harivaṃśa* is an addition to the classical *Mahābhārata*'s eighteen parvans.

Let us also note that according to Frasca (1984, 160), a play titled "The Birth of Kṛṣṇa" (*Kiruṣṇan Jananam*)—equivalent at least to the opening scenes of "Water Sports"³—is sometimes joined at the beginning of the cycle by an additional extra play called "The Story of Prahlāda" (*Piraklātan Carittiram*). Like "Water Sports," this play also deals with a theme popularized through the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and centered on the *avatāra* mythology of Viṣṇu. Again, while it is not *Mahābhārata* strictly speaking, the Prahlāda myth has a great importance within the *Mahābhārata* of the Draupadī cult (see chap. 11, Sec. C).

1. Śrī Kaṇṇan Jalakkirītaiyennu Kuruṣṇa Vilācam (1974; henceforth KJ); apparently published earlier, and now out of print, by C. M. Tamotara Mutaliyār under the title Śrī Kaṇṇan Jalakkirītai Nāṭakam (Madras, cited in a 1955 publication). Discussion is based on the chapbook version; a shortened, self-sponsored nonfestival viewing of the drama in January 1982 by the Pakkiriṭṭaiyām troupe; a festival version at Mēlaccēri by the same troupe in 1986 (not cited in table 6, as the drama cycle was no different there than in 1982); and interviews with my main dramatist informants.

2. At Tindivanam, the cycle from *Arakkumālikai* to *Paṇiṇēṭṭāmpōr* ("Eighteenth-Day War") ideally includes eighteen dramas. At Marutāṭu, there are eighteen dramas between *Jalakkirītai* at the beginning and *Paṭṭāpicēkam* (Dharma's "Coronation," another "extra") at the end.

3. At Kalahasti (Chittoor District) Draupadī festivals, one finds the introductory play called *Krishna Leela* (Chandra Sekhar 1961d, 108), while *Jala Kreedalu* ("Water Sports") is used to refer to a decoration of Kṛṣṇa's icon, and probably a drama, on the night prior to the celebration of Draupadī's marriage (ibid., 121).

In stressing the complementarity of the epic cycle and the youth of Kṛṣṇa, the Draupadī cult draws on a widespread South Indian tendency to regard the *Mahābhārata*, the Kṛṣṇa cycle (as represented by the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*), and the *Rāmāyaṇa* as constituting a comprehensive triad of interdependent bhakti lore, each part with its own reciters and authorities both in Sanskrit and the vernaculars.⁴ One may even suspect that the two epics and the *Harivaṃśa* constituted such a triad by the end of the period of their composition (ca. A.D. 400–500), and that the relation between these traditions was only reinforced when the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* was introduced to replace the *Harivaṃśa*. The *Bhāgavatam*, apparently composed in the south in the ninth or tenth century (see most recently Hardy 1983, 486–88, 637–46; Hawley 1983, 21–23, 85), clearly overshadowed the *Harivaṃśa* (itself once quite influential in the southern bhakti movement: see Hardy 1983, 473) as the authoritative work concerning Kṛṣṇa. It is clearly the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*'s version of the Kṛṣṇa cycle that stands closest to the play *Jalakkirīṭai*.

As an introduction, *Jalakkirīṭai* serves many functions. First, in portraying the carefree and auspicious scenes of Kṛṣṇa's childhood, it offers a propitious and lighthearted opening for the dramas, one that stands in marked contrast to the somber atmosphere of much that is to follow. Moreover, *Jalakkirīṭai*'s setting introduces the dramas on another immediate "village" note: though we soon arrive at the epic settings of palace court and battlefield, we begin "at home" in the cowherd village of Vraja transposed onto the local open air stage. Moreover, it was emphasized by my main Teruk-kūttu informants that one cannot fully appreciate Kṛṣṇa's activities among the Kṣatriyas of the *Mahābhārata* without the cowherd introduction. We thus find in this conjunction one of many reinforcements in Draupadī cult mythology of the close relation between two of the cult's most prominent castes, the Kōṇārs and Vaṇṇiyars—the first claiming shepherd and Kṣatriya descent from the Yādava Kṛṣṇa, and the latter claiming Kṣatriya descent from the Pāṇḍavas.⁵ Indeed, to local eyes, Kṛṣṇa is a Kōṇār. These complementarities in the mythology and social fabric of the cult underscore the symbolism that Biardeau (1978, 204–37) has detected in the classical texts: Kṛṣṇa's cowherd "disguise"—his *veṣam*—conceals and foreshadows his Kṣatriya identity, while his Kṣatriya destiny will recall his capacity as "protector of cattle" (*gopāla*). It

4. See, e.g., Thurston and Rangachari 1904, 3: 318; Roghair 1982, 206, 214; Nagaraja Rao 1979, 20–32, 86.

5. Cf. chap. 3, n. 6; chap. 5, n. 26; and see chap. 5, sec. C, chap. 7, sec. A.

is thus fitting that Kṛṣṇa's "cowherd" actions should be a prelude to his service to the royal Pāṇḍavas. In this light, the most crucial introductory function of *Jalakkirīṭai* is to provide an uproarious theological prelude to Kṛṣṇa's epic entanglements. It could hardly be more vividly and forcefully emphasized that it is one and the same Kṛṣṇa who lends his mystery to these two interdependent settings.⁶

We need not concern ourselves with the drama's early episodes. They parallel incidents familiar from the Sanskrit tradition, though not without innovation: Vasudeva's marriage to Devakī and Rohiṇī;⁷ Kāṁsa's opposition to Kṛṣṇa's birth; the births of Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma, and their sister, Parāśakti; the exchange of the babies; the boys' childhood in the "village of the cowherd caste" (*āyarpāṭi*); the butter theft, Pūtana, cart-kicking, and dirt-eating episodes; and the taming of Kāliya. Everything moves toward the final episode, after which the play is named: Kṛṣṇa's "water sports" with the Gopīs.

The episode in question depicts Kṛṣṇa's theft of the Gopīs' sarees. The Gopīs, wishing to obtain Kṛṣṇa's grace (*aruḷ*), perform pūjā to the goddess Gaurī and go on a fasting vow to bathe in the Yamunā River. Once there they remove their sarees (covering sarees for the actors, who do not of course undress), loosen their hair, enter the water neck-deep with joined hands, and begin to play about. Determined to humble their pride, and to shame them for complaining about him to Yaśodā, Kṛṣṇa steals up on them, takes their sarees, and climbs with them up into a punnai tree (*KJ*, 98–102). There he drapes the sarees from the branches and sits amid them with his flute. At first the Gopīs notice only that their sarees are missing, and they cry out, uncertain and afraid. But Kṛṣṇa sounds his flute and shows where he and the sarees are. The Gopīs rebuke him for his joke and try every argument to get him to give their clothes back. But all to no avail: they must come naked before him. Finally, they emerge from the water and describe, as they act

6. This is not the place to resume discussion of the unity of the Kṛṣṇa figure (see Biarreau 1978, 204–37; Hildebeitel 1983, 1985b). What is of the moment is that the Terukkūttu dramas treat Kṛṣṇa integrally, as do the *Mahābhārata* and the *Harivaṁśa*.

7. The most striking novelties occur in this episode: Devakī and Rohiṇī are sisters of sixteen and fifteen distraught at their bridegroom's great age. All three newlyweds join Kāṁsa (the girls' brother) on a forest hunt. There the girls tease Kāṁsa into shooting down a mango tree's single fruit, from which each eats half and gets pregnant. The tree belongs to the sage Bharadvāja's ashram, however, and the single fruit was to be an offering to Śiva. So Bharadvāja curses Kāṁsa to be killed by his sisters' eighth son (based on performed version; cf. *KJ*, 12–16). On the mango, cf. n. 25 below.

it out, how they cover their "shame" or "modesty" (*veṭkam*) with lotus (*alli*) flowers. Then, when Kṛṣṇa insists, they join their raised hands to praise him as God. The lotuses cling to their wet skin (as described), or they fall at his feet (*KJ*, 114). Kṛṣṇa then pardons the Gopīs and shows his grace, handing the sarees down from the tree and promising Nirvana (*KJ*, 115) to those who perform the Gopīs' bathing vow. The Gopīs agree with Kṛṣṇa that there is no fault in appearing naked before God, gather up their sarees, and go home.

One should appreciate that the culminations of Terukkūttu dramas are important for the manner in which they pace the Draupadī festival through a series of decisive mythic moments. The nightlong dramas, acted out on a small patch of ground beneath petromax lanterns, are finally unraveled at dawn on a stage that grows with the morning light to include first the surrounding outlines of village trees and buildings and then, in effect, the familiar world of the day. In this liminal timespan, the concluding scenes of the dramas have great force, for they provide powerful images upon which the narrative skein of the festival may hang, as it were, until the resumption of dramas in the coming evening. All such endings are thus important for their visual impact. The actors, portraying gods, demons, and other figures of living myth, convey a lingering visual presence, one that comes across most vividly when they close a climactic scene—especially one that ends a drama—with a pause that arrests the movement in an iconic tableau. That is certainly what we have in the ending of *Jalak-kirīṭai*. The vision of Kṛṣṇa in the tree with the flute and sarees at the break of dawn is a familiar bhakti tableau, a spectacle of the divine that is shared by the Gopīs and the audience alike.

As an introduction to the *Mahābhārata*, however, it is most significant that the final scene of *Jalak-kirīṭai* presents Kṛṣṇa in a vignette that will have a close visual counterpart at the end of the most important drama about Draupadī in the entire epic cycle. In *Jalak-kirīṭai* he steals the sarees of the Gopīs; in *Cūtu Tuṇṇilurital*, or "Dice Match and Disrobing," he prevents the removal of the sarees of Draupadī. The Sanskrit names of the two incidents, which informants know in Tamil form as alternate titles, are clearly contrastive: *vastraharaṇam* or *vastrāharaṇam*, "the theft of the sarees," in "Water Sports"; and *vastrāpaharaṇam*, "the removal of the sarees," in "Dice Match and Disrobing." Hawley also remarks that the two episodes have the very same name (*cīr haran*) in Hindi, though from the perspective of the Draupadī cult one might rephrase his statement that "the story of Draupadī, though everyone knows it, has no connection with the Krishna of Braj" (1981, 36–37; cf. also 219–20).

It is perhaps also noteworthy that the point at which the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* introduces its single reference to Kṛṣṇa as "beloved of the Gopīs" is in the very scene under discussion: a verse "interpolated" into the northern recension in Draupadī's prayer to Kṛṣṇa to prevent her disrobing (2.543*, l. 2; also 542*, l. 1; see Hildebeitel 1980b, 99–100). However, it is not a simple matter to suggest that this "northern interpolation" is an allusion to the theft of the Gopīs' sarees, for the latter episode, as we shall see, is not included in early northern versions of the Kṛṣṇa-Gopī cycle.

In any case, in the Draupadī festival cycle, there is nothing automatic about the selection of the theft of the Gopīs' sarees as the final scene of the inaugural drama about Kṛṣṇa's youth. In North India, for instance, where drama cycles about Kṛṣṇa such as the *Rās Līlā* carry his story from birth to youth, it is common to make the *Mahārās Līlā*, "The Drama of the Great Circle Dance," the focus of Kṛṣṇa's "sports" with the Gopīs, and to conclude the cycle with dramas concerned with Kṛṣṇa's return to Mathurā, his killing of Kāṃsa (which may by itself be omitted), and his separation from the Gopīs. The drama concerning the theft of the sarees (the *Cīrharan Līlā*) is never more than a prelude to the "Great Circle Dance" (see Hein 1972, 160, 179–221; Hawley 1981, 106–7, 226–74, 306 n. 4).

As we have seen, the theft of the sarees has been shown to have a distinctly southern origin. No such episode appears in either the *Harivaṃśa* or the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*. Rather, Hardy has shown that the hiding of the clothes of the Gopīs is one of six incidents alluded to in the *Cilappatikāram* that require the hypothesis of "an idiosyncratic Kṛṣṇa-carita tradition that has no direct parallels in the Northern material" and grows from "an autonomous Tamil development" (1983, 180–81). Furthermore, Hardy suggests that an allusion in *Akanāṇūru* 59.6 to Kṛṣṇa stamping a tree "so that the cowherd girls might dress themselves with its cool leaves, on the sandy bank of the Tolunai [Yamunā]" is an even earlier Tamil version of the same episode, in which the archaic sexual overtones of supplying the girls with leaf garments (probably a sign of puberty) have been amplified and transformed by the overtly sexual theme of the theft of the sarees (1983, 194, 195). Let us note that at least in *Jalakkirīṭai*, the leaves have not been entirely lost. The saree-theft theme is then further picked up by the Ālvars and finally embedded in the purāṇic Kṛṣṇa-carita tradition in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (Hardy 1983; Hawley 1983). Hawley informs us further that it is particularly in Hoysala and contemporary Orissan sculpture, and in Vijayanagar sculpture thereafter, that the saree-stealing theme makes its

most prominent appearances in temple art, particularly in contexts suggesting Kṛṣṇa's transition from butter thief to saree thief to thief of love (1983, 45, 53, 76–82). As we saw in chapter 2, it is probably in the Hoysala and early Vijayanagara periods that the Draupadī cult took on its enduring contours, drawing from the popularity of these devotional themes from the *Bhāgavatam* and the *Bhāratam* and bringing them into their expressive rapport.⁸ As they are performed, the two complementary scenes are among the most prominent in the entire cycle to depict the bhakti ideal.⁹

Both the Gopīs and Draupadī appeal to Kṛṣṇa as the god who saved the elephant Gajendra (Kajēntiraṇ) from the crocodile that had caught him (KJ, 113; Irāmaccantira Kavirāyar [1857] 1977, 84), ■ *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* myth that evokes Kṛṣṇa's instantaneous and unconditional response to his devotees. They both must be willing to bare themselves before Kṛṣṇa, although he causes the Gopīs to appear naked and prevents the nakedness of Draupadī. Not only do the women in both scenes face real or potential nakedness, but in each case there is a double emphasis on the themes of loosened sarees and loosened hair (see Hildebeitel 1981, 182–83; 1985a). The Gopīs remove their sarees, and they also “loosen their hair-knots” (*koṇṭaikaḷaiyum aviḷṭtu viḷṭtu*) before bathing (KJ, 101), just as Draupadī will loosen her hair (*kūntal* or *koṇṭai*) before entering the gambling hall, or *sabhā*, where the attempt will be made to disrobe her. Here the same symbols have opposite evocations: in the Gopīs' case, eroticism; in Draupadī's, impurity and violence. These oppositions resonate with deep devotional themes. Thus both the Gopīs and Draupadī join their raised hands in scenes of devotional abandonment.¹⁰ But whereas the Gopīs learn a “private” lesson by the riverside, Draupadī makes her gesture spontaneously, abandoning herself to Kṛṣṇa's grace before an assembly filled with men. There are no lotus flowers to conceal her modesty, only her bloodstained menstrual garment.

But it is especially the visual impact that links the two scenes. Not only is there the common gesture of the joined hands upraised

8. See especially chapter 2 on the emergence of other Hoysala artistic themes adopted into the Draupadī cult.

9. A third is Kṛṣṇa's theophany in “Kṛṣṇa the Messenger” (see chap. 14), though there are of course other scenes of bhakti to Kṛṣṇa as well as to Draupadī, other goddesses, and Śiva.

10. Draupadī's *caraṇākati*, her turning to Kṛṣṇa for refuge, is (like the saree theft from the Gopīs) hallowed in Āḷvār poetry (Tirumaṅkai Āḷvār, *Periya Tirumoli*, Triplacane stanza 1–3), and in later Śrī Vaiṣṇava commentarial literature (C. Jaganathachariar and Patricia Mumme, personal communications).

in the devotional salute. In each case there are the sarees, variegated and multicolored (see *KJ*, 104; also below, chap. 11), in one moment littering the ground in disarray, in another handed down from above as the visible and tangible symbols of grace.

According to my two main Terukkūttu informants, in *Jalakkirītai* Kṛṣṇa will either take the sarees into an appropriate tree near the stage, usually a banyan or peepul (both of which are trees linked with other theophanies of Kṛṣṇa), or a freshly cut leafy tree, just big enough for him to climb into, will be cut and temporarily set up near the stage (as at Mēlaccēri in 1986). It will in any case be called a *punṇai* tree in performance, the correct tree according to the drama (see *KJ*, 104). But the *punṇai*, being a rare tree, is seldom available, and substitutes are thus normally used. Why this particular tree appears in these folk dramas is a mystery. Could it be a distant echo of *Pinṇai*, Kṛṣṇa's oft-forgotten favorite (she receives no mention in *Jalakkirītai*) among the early Tamil Gopīs, who in the *Cilappatikāram* is the foremost of those to whom Kṛṣṇa returns garments? (See Hardy 1983, 176.) Fabricius (followed by Winslow but not by the *Tamil Lexicon*) gives *pinṇai*, "a flower-tree, *pinṇai maram*," as a variant of the more proper *punṇai*, a tree that all the dictionaries identify as Alexandrian laurel or Mastwood. Meanwhile, entirely different trees are mentioned in Ālvār poetry and in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (Hardy 1983, 195–96, 514, and n. 94; Hawley 1983, 29; 1981, 34–36).

It is true that Kṛṣṇa does not dispense the infinite sarees to Draupadī from a tree. He either stands behind her on the musicians' platform or sits atop the actors' changing room right behind the stage. But there is often a tree behind the changing room, as at Tindivanam, where in 1981 a flute-holding Kṛṣṇa sat—in the position from which he was soon to replenish Draupadī's sarees—high above the audience on the pinnacle of the thatched changing room roof in such a way that his own outline against the dim dawn sky formed a whole with the branches of the huge peepul tree behind him (see plate 13).¹¹ It is hard to imagine that I was the only one to sense that the complementarity of the two scenes had, at least in this one setting, been evoked at its logical limit.

B. *Turōṇāccāri Yākacālai*, "Droṇācārya's Sacrificial Hall"

Yākacālai weaves together stories that take one, in the *Mahābhārata*, from the birth of Aśvatthāman (Acuvattāmā) to the birth of Drau

11. As performed by the Verri Viṇāyakar Nāṭakapā of Pompūr village (near Vikaravāṇṭi, Villupuram Taluk, South Arcot).

paḍi.¹² For the most part, it follows an outline that is familiar from the Sanskrit epic, with occasional details that show the more immediate influence of Villiputtūr. But the opening scenes, filled with novelties, are an exception. As is so often the case in these dramas, the innovative material is centered on a female figure: Aśvatthāman's mother, Kṛpī (Kirupaṅkaṇi). In classical sources Kṛpī has only a bit part: sister of Kṛpa, wife of Droṇa, mother of Aśvatthāman. Here, although she does not reappear after the first half of the play, she is the subject of the drama's alternate title, *Kirupaṅkaṇi Carittiram*.

Following the Kaṭṭiyaṅkāraṇ's introduction, Droṇa (i.e., Tu-rōṇāccāri) joins him on the stage. Wearing his sacred thread, Droṇa asserts his Brahman rectitude from the start. Hearing that the Kaṭṭiyaṅkāraṇ comes from a *cēri*, an Untouchable "colony," Droṇa says he will have to avoid touching him. But the Kaṭṭiyaṅkāraṇ reassures him: the *cēri* he comes from is Pondicherry. Droṇa then boasts of his wife Kṛpī's exemplary education and chastity, and calls for her.

Summoned by her husband, Kṛpī comes forth and kneels before him to receive his blessing. The couple is childless, but Droṇa has a plan to change this. He tells Kṛpī that she should undertake a vow called *taruma annatāṇam*, "the virtuous giving of food" (in particular, boiled rice) to the poor, the public, or any other visitor. In fact, she should give whatever should be requested. So saying, Droṇa sets off to the river to bathe, and Kṛpī prepares a vast charity meal. To her surprise, no one comes.¹³

The curtain is then lifted to reveal an instantly hilarious figure: Śiva with topknot, six-inch mustache, waist-length beard, and sunglasses. He has come in disguise as the Ṛṣi Caṅkumār, and with him, also disguised, is the Ṛṣi Nārada. Their purpose, says Śiva, is to satisfy his curiosity about one of Kṛpī's beauty marks. Once while he was enjoying the beauty of Pārvatī, he noticed a "fish-shaped mark" (*macca rēkai*) on her right thigh. This pleased him no end until he learned during a visit from the inveterate troublemaker Nārada that Kṛpī also bore such a fish mark, identically located, and that she was even more beautiful than Pārvatī.

12. Discussion is based on observing the R. S. Natarajan troupe's shortened version of the play in April 1982. There does not appear to be a printed version. However, a drama dealing with the birth of Draupadī is mentioned on the back of a 1967 Caṅmukānanta Puttakacālai publication under the title *Tirupatai Uṟpatti yennum Aruccuṇaṇ Turupatēyaṇ Caṇṭai Nāṭakam*. The apparent subtheme in the title of a combat between Arjuna and the Draupadeyas, or sons of Draupadī, is unknown to me, and is perhaps a reference to Arjuna's fight with Drupada.

13. One recognizes here the echoes of so many other stories where sages' wives (Reṇukā, Ahalyā) are tested in their husbands' absences.

Now he has come to see for himself, and feigning great hunger, he demands rice to eat.

Kṛpī welcomes them and prepares to feed them, but Śiva will only eat if she meets one condition: "You must serve the food with nothing on" (*nirvāṇattoṭu cāppāṭu aḷikka vēṇṭum*). Kṛpī is shocked at such a request. How, she weeps, can she maintain her chastity, fulfill her husband's charge, and honor her guest under such conditions? But Śiva persists in his demands, and finally she agrees. She removes the flowers from her kūntal and lets her hair fall to conceal her vagina. (As to the actor's saree, though Kṛpī is naked to the imagination, it is left intact.) But as she comes forth with two leaf-plates of food for her now seated guests, she wears a small wooden-framed mirror tied to her thigh: something, according to the actors, to catch attention, and in any case her "fish mark."

The very sight of it is too much for Śiva. While Kṛpī leaves to get him a second serving, Śiva tells Nārada he is overwhelmed with desire and ejaculates onto his rice. Then he leaves with Nārada without eating it. When Kṛpī returns to find the rice covered with semen,¹⁴ she orders her servant (the Kaṭṭiyaṅkāraṇ) to feed it to a horse. The horse (offstage, as it were) gets pregnant, delivers, and dies, and (all this in a trice) Kṛpī turns around with a little boy on her arm plucked from the audience.

Now Droṇa reappears. He does find Kṛpī's story hard to believe, and he interrogates her, at first doubting her chastity. But at last he is convinced by a more detailed explanation. Moreover, the baby's face looks like that of a horse while his body is human. At this point Vyāsa (Viyācar, Vētaviyācar) appears and lends his approval, and together they name the child Aśvatthāman (retaining the etymology from Sanskrit *aśva*, "horse").

The weaving in this portion of the play of novel "epic" and "folkloric" themes with traditional epic characterizations is remarkable. For instance, Aśvatthāman is in classical epic terms an incarnation of a portion of Siva, and he gets his name because he whinnies at birth like a horse (*Mbh.* 1.61.66; 121.13–14). Here his filiation is unmistakably enriched, and the suggestion that he is a reverse centaur, with horselike head and human body, is not only linked to his name and neigh, but is an evocation of a series of interrelated horse-headed apocalyptic images: the *avatāra* Kalki, the doomsday mare whose fire-breathing burns the ocean, and the

14. On connections between rice and semen, see O'Flaherty 1980, 48–53, 106, 155–56, 175–76.

sometimes equine fifth head of Brahmā.¹⁵ Aśvatthāman's destructive role is thus reinforced and, in terms of his part in the Draupadī cult *Mahābhārata*, darkly foreshadowed through a most precise eschatological symbol (see chaps. 17–19).

But most interesting for now is the "fish mark," a symbol we might already recall in connection with Baka the "Crane," and that we shall have many occasions to come back to. Most striking here are its associations with Pārvaṭī and its links with uncontrollable desire. But the mirror, at first sight only a whimsical stage prop, alerts us to something more. As we shall soon see, Arjuna, like Śiva, will also look into a mirror (or its equivalent) and see a fish in the test that will enable him to win Draupadī as his bride.

Moreover, the novel material at the beginning of this play bears certain resemblances to *Jalakkirīṭai*. Either play can begin the festival cycle with an accent on boisterous humor. Yet in each case, the lighter scenes have their darker foreshadowings. Once again a heroine is tricked into appearing naked and dishevelled before a god. There is also thematic development here. This time it is not the rustic Gopīs appearing before the playful Kṛṣṇa, but a chaste Brāhmaṇī fooled by the lustful ascetic Śiva. We are thus alerted to a current of suggestive rapports between Kṛṣṇa and Śiva.

As to the rest of *Yācacālai*, it is far less innovative, and is marked by a striking shift in tone from the burlesque to the seriousness of the main epic story. Droṇa, impoverished, seeks out his former friend Drupada (Tirupataṇ, usually called Pāñcālarājaṇ, king of Pāñcāla) and requests a cow for the baby's milk.¹⁶ But Drupada, ignoring former promises, spurns him. Droṇa vows revenge, goes to Hāstinapura (Hastinapuripaṭṭaṇam), and takes over from his aging brother-in-law Kṛpa the job of training the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas in the arts of war. The scene of this training is the *yācacālai* of the play's title. The use of this term in this connection is apparently an innovation of the drama. Ordinarily a *yācacālai* is a sacrificial hall, or more particularly an enclosure where oblations are made into the fire during a temple festival. At Draupadī temples that have such a separate structure (e.g., the Dharmarāja-Viṇāyakar temple in Muthialpet, Madras), the *yācacālai* is where the Nava-dhānya, the "nine grains" ceremony, is performed. Sprouts of nine grains are grown in pots, and then, before they mature, are in one

15. See *ibid.*, 212–16; Kramrisch 1981b, 262; and *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa* 1.22.14–16 on the horse head of Brahmā.

16. For an important discussion of the symbolism of the Droṇa-Drupada cycle in the Sanskrit epic, see Biarreau 1976, 241–54; CR 87, 153–55.

way or another made into offerings (see chap. 13, Sec. C). Possibly the training place of the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas is called a yācacālai on this analogy, as the heroes are young, like sprouts, and when they finish their tutelage they must in effect make themselves offerings to Droṇa by meeting his demand that they pay his "guru's fee" by carrying out his retaliation against Drupada.

In this scene, after the hundred Kauravas fail to humiliate Drupada, Droṇa appoints Arjuna to the task, and Arjuna succeeds in tying Drupada to his chariot with his bowstring and bringing him before Droṇa. The *Villipāratam* 1.3.80 (cf. 1.3.45) has the same scene, whereas the Sanskrit epic has Drupada captured either by all of Droṇa's disciples together (1.128.1–4) or by all the Pāṇḍavas (1.154.20–22). Here as elsewhere, Villi and the Draupadī cult heighten the role of Arjuna. Droṇa then humiliates Drupada by taking the northern half of his kingdom for himself, and Drupada seeks his own revenge against Droṇa by engaging the two sages Yāja and Upayāja (Yācaṇ or Upayaṇ and Upayācaṇ) to conduct the sacrifice that will enable him to fulfill a vow (*capatam*) to have a son to behead Droṇa and a daughter to marry Arjuna. This double requirement is traceable to *Villipāratam* 1.3.84. In the Sanskrit epic Drupada longs only for a son, and Draupadī comes forth gratuitously (1.155).

The last scene, to be staged at daybreak, is the rite that results in Draupadī's birth—her "first," pre-Gingee birth—from the sacrificial fire. A simple straw fire is lit at center stage, and a curtain is held before the musicians' bench. While the fire burns, choral songs announce the double births of Dhṛṣṭadyumna (Tuṣṭatūymaṇ, Tiruṣṭatūymnaṇ) and Draupadī. Then the goddess alone strides forth from the lifted curtain. The chorus describes her: born in a *yākam* (sacrifice), thus to be called Yācacēni (Sanskrit Yajñasenī: "she whose army is the sacrifice"), having no mother but the fire (Akkiṇi, Agni). Then, in a closing dialogue with her brother (represented by the Kaṭṭiyankāraṇ) she informs him that he must kill Droṇa. Let me emphasize that this message comes from Draupadī. I will return to the significance of the death of Droṇa in the closing chapters of this book.

It is also noteworthy that the play, at least as I observed it, accentuates the fire-birth of Draupadī at the expense of that of her brother. In the Sanskrit epic, it is Dhṛṣṭadyumna who is a "portion of Agni" (*Mbh.* 1.61.87, 15.39.14; see Hiltebeitel 1976a, 317–19), born directly from the sacrificial fire, while Draupadī is born from the center of the earthen altar, or *vedi* (1.155.41). Here again the drama draws from Villiputtūr, who has Draupadī born from a pe-

runtī, a "great fire" (1.3.90; cf. 1.5.6, 25). One thus finds an important aspect of Dhṛṣṭadyumna's symbolism yielded to his sister. This impoverishment of Dhṛṣṭadyumna's epic link with fire to the enrichment of other figures is something that will bear further notice. It marks a significant tendency in the Draupadī cult to reallocate the epic's symbolism of fire.

C. Arccuṇaṇ Vil Vālaippu and Turōpatai Mālaiyīṭu,
 "Arjuna's Bending of the Bow" and
 "The Garlanding of Draupadī."

Though there are rare cases where *Vilvālaippu* and *Turōpatai Mālaiyīṭu* refer to two separate or alternate plays (see the three examples in table 6), it is more common for them to be used as alternate titles for a single drama about Draupadī's marriage.¹⁷ The currently available Irattīṇa Nāyakar chapbook version uses both titles and condenses Irāmaccantira Kavirāyar's similarly double-titled play *Vilvālaittu Mālaiyīṭutal* ("Bow-Bending and Garlanding") from the eighty-six pages of its 1875 edition to fifty-two pages (cf. chap. 7, no. 27). Significantly, under one title or the other, the play appears in all but two of the twenty-five drama cycles in our sample. In this regard, it is far more "indispensable" to the festival than either of the other "introductory" dramas just discussed. Moreover, it is the material of this drama, or pair of dramas, that is introduced by the "Death of Baka." And it is especially at festivals where the Terukkūttu cycles are shorter that one or the other of these titles will open the series of plays.

The main action of the play follows somewhat loosely an outline familiar from both Sanskrit and Tamil sources. At certain crucial points it shows direct familiarity with themes shaped by the *Vil-lipāratam*, but it is by no means consistently drawn from Villi.¹⁸

The Kaṭṭiyaṅkāraṇ opens the play on a confidential note: the Pāṇḍavas have escaped from the inflammable lacquer house that Duryodhana has set as a deathtrap for them in the city of Vāraṇ-āvata, but neither Duryodhana nor Drupada knows this. I forego a direct discussion of *Arakkumālikai*, "The Lacquer House" (1967;

17. Discussion is based mainly on a shortened version seen performed by the R. S. Natarajan troupe in January 1982, and the Irattīṇa Nāyakar printed version (1980; henceforth *AVV*). A few observations also derive from a performance by the R. S. Natarajan troupe at the 1986 Mēlaccēri festival (cf. n. 1).

18. Irāmaccantira Kavirāyar's *Cūtu Tuylurital* ("Dice Match and Disrobing") follows Villi far more closely (see chap. 11, sec. B).

henceforth *AM*), the seldom-performed play that chronologically precedes Draupadī's marriage (see table 6) and that includes this episode. But it is significant that this latter drama, in what seems to be an innovation of its own, identifies Vāraṇāvata as Kāci (*AM*, 28, 33) or Banaras. Presumably this identification derives from a linguistic confusion of Vāraṇāvata with Vārāṇasi (Banaras).¹⁹ In any case, it is certainly intriguing, for it intensifies the association of Vāraṇāvata with Śiva. Whereas in the epic the Pāṇḍavas are invited to Vāraṇāvata to enjoy a festival in honor of Śiva (1.131.3), in the play they go to the city of Śiva himself in order to perform death rites for their father, Pāṇḍu (*AM*, 18, 24). In the traditional story, Duryodhana's linking of the festival of Śiva with the burning house is an unmistakable image of the Pralaya, Śiva's dissolution of the universe by fire. In the play, the Pāṇḍavas go to Banaras, the eternal city whose survival of the Pralaya now provides a new image of their own miraculous survival.

Unapprised of the Pāṇḍavas' escape, Drupada makes his entry lamenting their reported demise. He wonders how he will now fulfill his second "vow," familiar now from the play *Yākacālai* and drawn from Villi, to marry Draupadī to Arjuna. Questioning his astrologers, however, he soon learns that the Pāṇḍavas and their mother, Kuntī, must be alive. He seeks advice from Vyāsa (a scene unknown to Villi or the Sanskrit epic), and he learns that there is a special bow in the Himalayas, in various ways linked to Śiva,²⁰ that only the Pāṇḍavas can bend. Drupada is told to obtain the bow, hold ■ *svayaṃvara* (*cuyamvaram*) or "self-choice" marriage ceremony, and challenge the kings to bend it for the right to marry Draupadī. He thus sends for the bow and invites the kings of the fifty-six countries to compete (*AVV*, 12; cf. Roghair 1982, 190 n. 64). When the bow arrives, Drupada gives orders—it is represented as his idea—that ■ special target be built called the *maccayantiram* (Sanskrit *matsyayantram*) or "fish contraption." The bow itself, now raised upright from a hole dug for it in the front left corner (from

19. The *Mahābhārata* is rather vague on the location of Vāraṇāvata; van Buitenen (1973, 462) says it was "fairly close to Hāstinapura." There is nothing there to identify it with Banaras.

20. In the chapbook version, the Himalayas are the only link to Śiva: the bow is "placed at Aṇumantātākai" (perhaps from *aṇumān-tatākam*, "pond of Hanumān," a suggestion of David Shulman's) and was made by one Yeku (*AVV*, 10, 13). In the performed version, Haṇumān Tāta ("grandfather"?) is the owner of the bow and arrow in the Himalayas, and the bow and arrow are brought from there to Drupada by Kiṅkiliyar, a Śivabhakta. Biarreau (in press) learned from a Reddi pāratīyār at the Pondicherry Draupadī temple that the bow was originally Śiva's own.

the audience's angle) of the stage, can be quite impressive. A photograph from the 1972 festival at Maṇāmpāṭi shows a sixty-foot-high bow made of three interconnected pieces. The device goes by various names—"Arjuna's bow tree" (*arccuṇaṇ vil maram*), "turmeric tree" (*maṇcaḷmaram*), or "drama tree" (*kūttu maram*)—and, as a symbol of the presence of the Terukkūttu troupe and their dramas, it remains standing through all the dramas and beyond, to the final closure of the festival. The one provided by the 1986 Mēlaccēri festival for the R. S. Natarajan troupe was about forty feet high, with mango leaves tied to it at six-foot intervals, and a sprouting crown sheaf of dried paddy on the top. Sometimes, as at this Mēlaccēri performance, the fish is left to the imagination, while at other performances a fish is provided, of which I will have more to say later.

The opening of the next scene, as performed by the R. S. Natarajan drama troupe, is stunning. Again one should recall that this is the play that most often introduces the Terukkūttu cycle, especially at shorter festivals, and even more important, it is usually the play that introduces Draupadī herself. She does not, of course, appear in *Jalakkirīṭai*. So it is only when the marriage drama is preceded or in effect replaced by *Yācacālai* (as in only four out of our twenty-five cases) that Draupadī's birth precedes or replaces the marriage scene as the occasion of her dramatic debut.²¹

The curtain is lifted by four men to form the ceiling of a pillared maṇḍapa. It is held over Draupadī, who stands on the musicians' bench. In her hands are a garland and a tray bearing a camphor flame. She holds these out before her for a long moment, then descends from the platform, walks gravely to mid-stage, and puts the lit camphor to the ground, where it quickly goes out. This is iconography in motion: it is as if Draupadī descends from the inner sanctum of her temple.²² As the chapbook version tells us, this is Turōpataiyammaṇ, the *kaṇṇi* Turōpatai (AVV, 17): lady, mother, goddess, and virgin.

Draupadī is in distress. She asks her friends (represented on stage by a single maidservant), "Among women in the world is there any sinner like me?" (AVV, 14–15). If the Pāṇḍavas have been

21. Draupadī's birth is sometimes performed ritually rather than dramatically, as at Tindivanam where the nonperformance of *Yācacālai* might thus result from its thematic redundancy.

22. There are frequent allusions in Beck, n.d., to the heroine Taṅkāl's being shaped like a sculpture. In this vein, there is a Terukkūttu drama about Draupadī (Kotantarāma Upāttiyāyar 1974), rarely performed, in which she turns into a stone statue to safeguard her chastity.

burned, if Arjuna does not come, then how can her father's vow be fulfilled? Accordingly she makes a vow of her own, recalling her birth from fire and announcing that if Arjuna does not come and bend the bow, then "easing my mind, I will lose my life, falling and increasing the great bright fire" (*mikka cen taṇalai mūṭṭi viṇṭ' uyir ilappēn*; AVV, 15-16).

This vow, unprecedented in the Sanskrit epic, was surely inspired by Villi, who outdoes even the play in developing the scene's fire symbolism. First, his Draupadī has very similar words to her serving maids:

When I was born from the fire, the man with the chest crowned with ornaments [Arjuna] was designated by my father with affection to appear in this golden hall on this day. If he does not marry me before this fire here [*iṇṭ' eri munṇar*], putting the kings to shame, then I will enter fire again [*mīṇṭ' eri pukavaṇ*]. (Villi 1.5.25)

Here it could not be clearer that Draupadī condenses the three fires of birth, marriage, and the funeral pyre. More than this, two and three verses later, when Draupadī enters the Svayaṃvara hall, her effect on the kings is "like putting fuel into the fire of desire" (*kāmat tīyil intaṇam iṭuvat' ēyppa*) so that they "all melted like fire-treated ghee" (*aḷal paṭṭa ney pōl anaivarum urukinār*). As the commentator Rājakōpālācāriyār remarks: "Seeing the girl who was born from fire, [the kings] became like ghee caught in fire" (1971, 1: 296). In other words, they become like sacrificial oblations, a foreshadowing of their self-offerings in the "sacrifice of battle." Let us note also that Villi (1.5.96) has Draupadī "bathe" or "enter into" (*mūḷku*) this marriage fire, the very "fire of her birth" (*iṇṇa . . . aḷalil*), after each of her five marriages to vouchsafe her chastity: a passage I will discuss in my concluding chapter. What is apparent, though, is that Villi's treatment of the symbolism of Draupadī's marriage fire is richly diversified and highly intensified: womb, birth, marriage, cremation, sacrificial offerings, heat of desire, source of purity, test of chastity. Although it is beyond proof that Villi was familiar with the Draupadī firewalking cult, it is likely that he was (cf. Shulman 1985, 14; Frasca 1984, 145, both in agreement), and that he has oriented the symbolism of Draupadī's marriage fire in a direction that enriches and is enriched by the cult's most determinative symbol.

Moreover, this scene is linked symbolically with many others, both in Villi and in the drama cycle. In the play itself, we have just seen Draupadī lament the apparent deaths of the Pāṇḍavas in the

fire at Vāraṇāvata. It is as if the Pāṇḍavas, to marry the goddess Draupadī, must first pass through fire themselves (a fire that links them, as we have seen, to Śiva). Meanwhile, following Villi (but also a theme developed in "Dice Match and Disrobing"), the other kings who submit to the "fire of desire" prefigure their own destruction in the fires of battle. Indeed, in Draupadī cult terms, it is not too much to say that all these forms of fire are manifestations of Draupadī and evocations of the ritual fire of the firewalk. Thus the vividness of her debut in this drama, flame in hand, standing like a temple statue overlooking her devotees.

From here on the drama proceeds for awhile along familiar epic lines: the Pāṇḍavas learn of Draupadī's Svayaṃvara from Vyāsa and disguise themselves as Brahmans; Arjuna defeats the Gandharva Citraratha and receives his blessings; the Pāṇḍavas arrive at Drupada's capital and stay at the house of a potter (AVV, 23). These episodes need not detain us. At last, when all the fifty-six kings and princes are assembled along with the disguised Pāṇḍavas in the Svayaṃvara hall, Drupada sends Dhṛṣṭadyumna for Draupadī. She enters, grieving that among all those present she does not see the Pāṇḍavas. Then Dhṛṣṭadyumna announces the terms of the Svayaṃvara test: "Hear, O kings. This is the bow, this is the arrow, and this above is the rotating fish contraption [*itu tāṇ villu, itu tāṇ ampu, itu tāṇ mēlē culalkinṇa maccayantiram*]. Whoever draws this bow and makes this fish contraption fall will become the husband of Draupadī" (AVV, 35). The phrasing is close enough to the *Villipāratam* to suspect that it is a free rendering of it. But Villi says nothing of a fish.²³

One by one, the assembled kings try their hands at the bow and fail. In performance, the actual challenge of "drawing the bow" consists in taking the end of the long rope that dangles from the top of the bamboo pole, pulling it so that the "bow" bends taut, and tying its lower end, behind one's back, to the bottom of the pole. Nothing could be easier than the actual bending of this flexible pole, but the kings who fail (these vary from drama to drama, but always include Karṇa and Duryodhana) boast, preen, and pull the rope in every direction before their inevitable pratfall. Only Karṇa comes close. In the chapbook, but not in any observed perfor-

23. *Villipāratam* 1.5.31: "This is the bow, these are the arrows" [*cilai itu cilī mukaṇkal ivai*]; this wheel speedily whirling, whoever hits the middle of the rotating wheel contraption without stopping the rotation, . . . to him this girl [*kaṇṇi*] will belong." Both commentators (Rājakōpālācāriyār 1971, 1: 279; Kōpālakiruṣṇamācāriyār 1976, 1: 287) compare the turning to a potter's wheel.

mance, he is foiled by Kṛṣṇa, who—in an entirely nonclassical innovation—comes in the guise of a rat (*eliyāka rūpam eṭuttu*; AVV, 44) and severs the bowstring, knocking Karna to the ground. At last, with no Kṣatriyas left, Arjuna asks whether a Brahman can try, and Dhṛṣṭadyumna replies affirmatively. When Arjuna at last draws the bow correctly and ties the rope behind him, Draupadī guesses who he is, steps forth to garland him, and then takes him joyfully into the hall with his four brothers. Outraged at this seeming slight to the Kṣatriyas, Karna and Duryodhana stir them up into a fight against the supposed Brahmans in which the latter, led by Arjuna, emerge victorious (see AVV, 48–51).

Finally, Draupadī marries not only Arjuna but all five of the Pāṇḍavas. Here the chapbook version ends abruptly with a tag-on summary, absent from Irāmaccantira Kavirāyar's "original" (1875, 86), that "in this way the Pañcapāṇḍavas, five men, having jointly adorned Draupadī with marriage garlands, made their way to Indraprastha" (AVV, 52). In the performed versions of the R. S. Natarajan troupe, however, it is announced, without it being enacted, that the Pāṇḍavas bring Draupadī before their mother, Kuntī, in the potter's house, where the fateful misunderstanding that results in Draupadī's polyandry ensues. But instead of Arjuna and Bhīma introducing Draupadī as the "alms"—*bhikṣā*: literally, "that [feminine] which one desires to share"—that they have won from begging while disguised as Brahmans, and instead of Kuntī instructing them to "share it all equally together" (*Mbh.* 1.182.1–4; cf. *Villipāratam* 1.5.64), in a marvelous "folk" adaptation Arjuna says, "Look at the girl [*kanni*] I have brought," and Kuntī, allegedly hard of hearing, says, "If it is a *kani* [fruit], you must all five share it equally among you." Arjuna then is the only one to garland Draupadī, but Kuntī announces that the meaning is that she weds all five.

The play thus closes with the garlanding, but it ends as spectacle with the richly developed scene involving the bending of the bow and the "fish contraption." The latter, as noted, may be left to the imagination. But what is supposed to happen to this fish, at least mythically, remains central to the drama. As my two chief Teruk-kūttu informants describe it, the "fish contraption" is separate from the bow and ideally consists of several elements: a post (a temple flagstaff may be used, as at Anmarutai); suspended from a beam at the top, the fish itself, called *maccentiraṇ* or "Lord of Fish" and said to be a *vālai mīṇ*—a name for several fish, all quite large—but actually represented by a rather small "doll" (*pomma*) made of wood, plastic, or cardboard; a wheel (*cakkiram*) set below the fish,

further down the post, which can be made to revolve, apparently from the beam above; and finally a second "doll," a child with a *tilakam* mark (a symbol of the third eye) on its forehead that is placed between the fish and the wheel. Arjuna must not only shoot the fish through the revolving wheel; he must also dislodge the *tilakam* from the child's forehead in such a way that it falls into a vessel of sandalwood powder. In addition, he cannot aim by looking upward, but must sight his target while bending over and looking downward into a vessel of water (cf. plate 3) or a well (as in a Sowcarpet temple fresco) that is represented in the drama by a mirror.²⁴ Once again, the fish in the mirror. And of course all the while he is singing and dancing.²⁵

As has already been noted, the classical Sanskrit and Tamil epics say nothing about Arjuna shooting a fish. But the theme is older than Villiputtūr. It seems to find its first flowering in Hoysala art and to have diffused from Karnataka to Tamilnadu in the late Hoysala or early Vijayanagar periods (see chap. 2, n. 16). At Draupadī temples I have found the scene depicted only once, in the afore-

24. Squaring descriptions and observations has been baffling at points. According to my two main informants, the fish *pomma* is never made of clay. Some troupes may keep one as a prop, but the *Anmarutai* temple has an orange wooden fish, about eight inches long, as part of its festival paraphernalia, along with a special flagstaff set inside the temple grounds from which the fish is hung during the drama. I found no other temple with such features. At Pondicherry, in lieu of a drama, a temporary fish-pole contraption is built on a processional chariot; the 1986 *Pāratīyār* there told that Arjuna sighted the fish in a pool, and then shot and caught it. Yet at the ritual enactment before this "bow chariot," the reflection pool was represented by a dish of red liquid representing blood (Shideler 1987, 141–48, n. 60).

25. There are striking similarities, both thematic and dramatic, between the staging of this episode and that of "The Shooting of the Mango" in the Sri Lankan Pattini cycle (Obeyesekere 1984, 227–38, 458, 491–95). Śakra (Indra, Arjuna's father), disguised as an unkempt and "impotent" Brahman, taunts the incompetent warriors present that he will break the bow that foils them and then marry one of their sisters or mothers. Then, revealing his true nature, the Śakra actor "falls flat on the ground, places the bow on his belly, and shoots 'down from below' " (236). The juice (or radiance) of the mango falls on the third eye of the evil Pandyan king of Madurai, and obliterates it. Eventually the mango, honeylike and fiery (225), finds its way to a merchant prince and his wife, and Pattini takes one of her several births from it. Obeyesekere compares the scene to the bow feats of Rāma and the Buddha (234), but the myth and drama are closer to the weave of images that relate Arjuna's feat to the myths of the three-eyed Śiva and his consort at Madurai (see below). There is also the episode in the *Epic of Palnāḍu* where a hero, to win a bride, must "cut down the fish device that is hung suspended by a hair"—a scene not only "similar to that in the *Mahābhārata*" (Roghair 1982, 148, 152) but clearly inspired by its "folk" variants.

mentioned fresco by a Vaṇṇiyar artist below the ceiling of the *ardhamanḍapa* of the Sowcarpet Draupadī temple in Madras (cf. plates 16 and 27 by the same painter). The painting depicts the wheel and the fish, but not the child with the tilakam, the latter being perhaps an extra marvel added to enhance the dramas. But one also finds large fish embossed on the stonework of the *ardhamanḍapa* ceilings in other Draupadī temples (e.g., at Tindivanam, Talāpuram, and Tūci), a position that evokes—even though one also finds such fish on the ceilings of Śiva temples—the elevated fish of the marriage scene.

As a symbol, Draupadī's fish is rich indeed. First of all, it joins a current that moves through the *Mahābhārata* itself: from the "fishy smelling" (*matsyagandhī*) Satyavatī-Kālī, the Pāṇḍavas' great-grandmother, and her twin brother, Matsya ("Fish"); to the Pāṇḍavas' encounter with Baka the "Crane," and Yudhiṣṭhira's adoption of his name during their year in disguise in the "womb" of the kingdom of Matsya; and on to the marriage of Arjuna's son Abhimanyu to the Matsya princess Uttarā, one of the original Matsya's descendants. Indeed, these are only the most prominent surfacings of a still more diversified epic symbolism that we have seen the folk epic extend to include Pārvatī and Droṇa's wife Kṛpī.²⁶ But they are sufficient to indicate three things: that fish-linked women make several appearances, all at crucial junctures, to attract the scions of the Lunar dynasty; that the marriage of Abhimanyu and Uttarā reunites two lines of piscine descent and gives their son, Parikṣit, the same "Fish" ancestor—a real fish, though also an Apsaras undergoing a curse (see *Mbh.* 1.57.45–52)—on both his mother's and father's sides of his family; and finally, that from a wide angle, the entire six-generation dynastic crisis of the *Mahābhārata*, from its beginnings with Śāntanu (Satyavatī-Kālī's husband) to its resolution with Parikṣit, is marked by the sign of the fish.

These epic associations between fish and kings have many resonances. In his classic article "La princesse à l'odeur de poisson et la *nāgī*," Przyluski has shown that the story of Satyavatī is one of many dynastic legends, found not only in India but in Southeast Asia and China, that tell of dynasties and kingdoms founded or revived by liaisons with fish-born or serpent-born men and women.²⁷ "The world of the waters," he says, "is the grand reservoir where

26. See Hildebeitel 1980c, 149–50 and n. 14; Biarreau CR 78, 43; 1976, 218–19 n. 1; CR 85, 165; 1978, 92–99. Also see Hildebeitel 1981, 194–95 (Draupadī's *sairandhri* disguise may be etymologically and symbolically linked to a kind of fish).

27. Przyluski argues that the older stories are those about fish and women, and derive from "matriarchal" Austroasiatic deltaic civilizations of Southeast Asia.

gods, saints, and kings draw their superior powers" (1925, 281). For our purposes it is risky to equate fish and Nāgas: Arjuna's marriage to the serpent woman Ulūpī (see chaps. 10 and 15), mother of Irāvāt (Aravāṇ), is no simple duplication of his winning of Draupadī. Indeed, the fish has its own special evocations of destruction and chaos. The epic heroes submit implicitly to what India calls the "law of the fishes" (*matsya nyāya*), the reign of chaos where "the big fish eat the little fish." But Przyłuski is certainly right that all "fish" alliances represent access to primeval forces, realms of riches (especially in the case of Nāgas), and a means of maintaining an accord between heavenly, earthly, and subterranean realms. While signifying chaos, they hold the promise of renewal. In marrying Draupadī, Arjuna and his brothers resume their Kṣatriya identities and reclaim their kingdom, just as they will when they emerge from their disguises in the "womb of Matsya."

More than just renewal, though, these epic liaisons involving fish are all tinged with the erotic. Satyavatī exchanges her fishy smell for a less embarrassing but apparently equally alluring and far-ranging perfume (*Mbh.* 1.57.54–68). Even with Uttarā, it is Arjuna's renunciation of any erotic feelings for her that allows her to play her crucial role as his daughter-in-law (4.66.26–67.9). We have seen the kings straining with desire to bend the bow that will allow them to pierce the "fish contraption" at Draupadī's Svayaṃvara. And then, of course, there is Śiva's uncontrollable excitement over the "fish marks" on Pārvatī's and Kṛpī's thighs.

India goes well beyond the understated treatment of the *Mahābhārata* in providing evidence on the erotic character of fish. Among Lohars, "the bride holds a fish made of flour in her hand and continually moves it so that the bridegroom, who is attempting to shoot at it, may not be easily successful": a practice for which Das (1932, 105) sees the Draupadī story as a possible prototype. Among outcaste Holeyas of Karnataka, the newly wedded couple is led to a river where they put a wedding mat woven by the bride into the water, catch some fish, and then let them go. "In some cases one fish is taken home and its scales adorn the forehead of the couple and they believe this ensures fertility" (Moses 1922–23, 54).²⁸ Before their first sexual relations, they thus adorn themselves with fish scales. The fish is the emblem of the god Kāma ("Desire") himself, who is described as "dolphin bannered" or "fish bannered" (*ma-*

28. Fish are proverbially fertile for the Holeyas, the female of one species (*Scomber microlepidotus*; Tamil *keḷutti*) being thought to deposit as many as 600,000 eggs at a time.

kara- or mīna-ketana; see Dikshit, n.d., 33). And one finds the fish as a *vāhana* (animal mount) of Pārvaṭī (Gopinatha Rao 1971, 1: 360; Burgess and Cousens 1888, pl. 20, fig. 11), if not on her thigh. Indeed, one even finds at Mer in the Shaḥabad District of Bihar an instance of a fish in the place of the yoni, supporting the lingam, in a Hindu temple (Buchanan 1926, 145; Mitra 1932, 86).

Clearly the symbolism is bisexual. Indeed, Villiputtūr (1.5.13) compares Arjuna's desire for Draupadī with a fish's breaking through the mud of a riverbank to get a mango: a reminder of Pattiṇi-Kaṇṇaki's birth from the mango in Sri Lankan myths, but also that Draupadī, in Kuntī's words, is a "girl" who is likewise a "fruit." On the other hand, in a version of the Reṇukā myth familiar among Cempaṭavars (inland fishermen; cf. n. 29) of South Arcot, Reṇukā loses her marital chastity when she sees the Gandharva Kārtavīrya Arjuna (apparently reflected in the water!) at the same time that she looks at a fish (Meyer 1984, 15). Similarly, in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, when Sītā thinks longingly of Rāma, her eye quivers "like a lotus stalk struck by a fish" (*Rām.* 5.27.2). But most haunting, further deepening the ambivalence of the symbol, are the "odes to the Kāvēri and songs appropriate to the seashore," sung by Kovalan to Mātavi in the *Cilappatikāram*. These songs about "Death," the lovely fishmonger girl with the long lancelike fish-shaped eyes (Dikshitar 1939, 133–34), confirm the antiquity of the symbol in the Tamil tradition.

Indeed, the *Cilappatikāram* celebrates not only the fish-shaped eyes of the girl Death, but those of the river Vaigai and of the heroine of the story, Kaṇṇaki, who becomes the goddess of chastity of the city of Madurai by which the Vaigai flows. For us, all this can serve only as preface to later traditions of Madurai that clearly continue these themes, focusing them on Madurai's great goddess Mīnākṣī, "she of the fish eyes." Within the sphere of Tamil culture, it is she who provides the richest elaboration of the fish symbol, and the most significant background for interpreting the fish at Draupadī's Svayaṃvara.

In the cycle of myths devoted to the "sacred amusements" of Śiva (Cuntarēcuvamar) at Madurai and found in the *Tiruvilaiyār-tarpurāṇam*, the *sthala-purāṇa* of the Madurai Mīnākṣī temple, there are two stories (its chapters 4, 5, and 57) that relate to the matter at hand. Not surprisingly, they concern the two points in the cycle at which Śiva and the goddess marry each other (see Harman 1983, 3). In the first, before she assumes divine status through her marriage, the goddess is a human princess named Taṭātakai, the daughter of a Pandyan king of Madurai. In the second, long after

her marriage has transformed her into the goddess Mīnākṣī, Śiva has a moment of pique on an occasion when Mīnākṣī is inattentive to his exposition of the Vedas, and he curses her to be reborn in a lowly caste of fishermen—a pronouncement he then mitigates, when she appeals to him, allowing her to take birth as the daughter of a “king of fishermen” with the promise that he will come to remarry her.²⁹

From this latter account, complicated at many points (see Desigane, Pattabiramin, and Filliozat 1960, fasc. 1, 88–91), the essential for us concerns the divine reunion. The childless “king of fishermen” finds Mīnākṣī at the seashore and raises her in his village as his daughter. When the girl comes of age, a huge and violent fish—really Nandi (Śiva’s bull), who had also been cursed by Śiva to take this form as part of the sequel to Śiva’s falling out with Mīnākṣī—menaces the fishing village and prompts the “fisher king” to announce that whoever can catch the fish can marry his daughter. Śiva assumes the form of a young and handsome fisherman and introduces himself to the fisher king as “the son of the king of fishermen of Madurai,” able to “easily catch fish no matter how big they are.” Śiva then nets the fish, draws it to shore, and marries the fisher king’s daughter. And then, in a miraculous transformation before the astonished eyes of the fisherfolk, Śiva, Mīnākṣī, and Nandi resume their true forms and appear in midair, the god and goddess mounted on the fish-turned-bull.

As Harman (1981, 171 n. 1) says, this marriage by announced contest reminds one of the Svayaṃvara motif. But that Śiva should win Mīnākṣī by catching a fish is more than just a form of Svayaṃvara: it is a striking multiform of the shooting of the fish that is required at the Svayaṃvara of Draupadī. Here let us recall once again that this latter story is well known not only in South India but beyond, and is by no means a special preserve of the Draupadī cult.

29. *Tiruvilaiyārtarpurāṇam* 57.20–22 (Desigane, Pattabiramin, and Filliozat 1960, fasc. 1, 89) makes an attempt to explain this anomalous title, which is shared with the father of Satyavatī-Kālī in the *Mahābhārata* (1.94.44ff.), and which in each story symbolically satisfies the requirement that kings marry fisher-“princesses.” It is instructive to note that Paravar fishermen of southern Tamilnadu have assimilated both of these stories into their caste mythology (Thurston and Rangachari 1904, 6: 141–42), as have Cempāṭavar inland fishermen in North and South Arcot (Meyer 1984, 98–102). The latter also tell that their royal fisherman ancestor helped the goddess *Ankāḷamman* defeat the demons who had taken the form of fish by day: he caught them and fed them to the goddess, who swallowed them (*ibid.*, 34–35, 98–99).

The myth concerning the initial marriage of Śiva to Taṭātakai is no less important, as it bears on the latter's divine name Mīnākṣī, "she of the fish eyes." Since much has been written on this topic, it is fitting to quote the summing up by Hudson (1981, 482), one of the principal contributors to the discussion: "Her name in Tamil, 'She with Beautiful Carp Eyes' (Aṅkayaṅkaṇṇi), is accorded various meanings: her eyes are large like fish eyes; they flash like fish in water; or, like fish eyes they never wink, a theologically important meaning, since as Mother of the Universe she gazes on her children (as a pond carp is said to gaze on its eggs), nurturing them with her power and compassion until their final rebirth out of *saṃsāra*."³⁰

Beyond these metonyms, metaphors, and theological abstractions, however, there is also the mythical context in which the divine name Mīnākṣī takes on its meaning. This is of course the context of marriage. Taṭātakai begins her career as a particularly aggressive three-breasted Amazon:

The girl was brought up as if she were a boy and, when her father died, she ascended the throne, to the delight of the fierce goddess whose spear seeks the flesh of enemies. She set out to conquer the world. Having overcome several armies, she came with her troops to Kailāsa. The army of Śiva fought with her and began to lose. Śiva himself took the field of battle. As soon as she caught sight of him, her third breast disappeared, and, overcome with modesty, innocence, and shyness, she began to scrape the ground shyly with her toe." (Shulman's translation [1980a, 202] from *Tiruvilaiyārtarapurāṇam* 5.1–44; cf. Dessigane, Pattabiramin, and Filliozat 1960, fasc. 1, 13)

As Shulman insists, it is Taṭātakai's seeing of Śiva that causes her to lose her third breast, and with it her aggressiveness. Indeed, Shulman has found the same correlation in variants of this myth from Nagapattinam and Sri Lanka (1980a, 204–7), and we shall meet a further example in our next chapter. In each case, with different heroines, the third breast disappears at the sight of the future husband. It is Śiva's act of arresting Taṭātakai's eyes that in effect transforms her "from a violent multiform of Korravai, the goddess of war, into a gentle wife" (Shulman, 1980a, 205): that is,

30. Cf. Heras 1947 and Brown 1947 (independent discoveries of the symbolism of divine nonblinking); Dave 1970, 1: 51 (Mīnākṣī blesses her devotees by her look just as a mother fish is said to feed her young by mere sight); Hudson 1971, 1977, 1982; and Shulman 1980a, 206–7.

into Mīnākṣī, she whose “fish eyes” become not only the eyes of love for Śiva, but for her devotees.³¹ Shulman also notes the complementarity between myths of the loss of a third breast with others of the loss of a third eye. In this regard, one will recall the doll between the fish and the wheel on Draupadī’s “fish contraption.” Draupadī loses no third breast, but the doll loses its tilakam, an unmistakeable image of the third eye.³² And the doll is a symbol for Draupadī as early as the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* (see Hildebrandt 1980b, 106; 1980c, 166; Biardeau 1978, 197–99).

Once again, we are not far conceptually from the fish that Arjuna must shoot to win Draupadī. Both heroines are dangerous maidens: Mīnākṣī especially before her marriage, Draupadī no less before her marriage—she is born from fire—than after her marital status has been sullied at the dice match. Their marriages make them at least temporarily compliant. It is perhaps not too much to note that whereas Mīnākṣī’s “fish eyes” are pierced by the proverbial “arrows of Kāma,” the fish-riding love god, Draupadī’s actual fish is pierced by the arrow of Arjuna.³³ Indeed, in some versions, Arjuna must pierce not only the fish, but its eye (Das 1932, 105; Dikshit, n.d., 33; Narasimhachar 1977, 12; and above, chap. 2, n. 16): a point that reminds us again of the dislodging of the tilakam of the doll between the fish and the wheel.

But finally, neither the *Mahābhārata*’s fish symbolism nor the myths of Mīnākṣī can explain in full the complex structure and precise details of this elaborate “fish contraption” and the challenge it poses. I thus suggest two lines of interpretation.

According to the pāratyār Adikeshava Bharatiyar, in bearing the name Savyasācin, Arjuna has a special *jñāna* (“knowledge”) that enables him to penetrate the maccayantiram. Savyasācin is usually translated “ambidextrous,” or more literally, “he who draws [the bow] with the left hand.” In the context of the Draupadī cult, where, as we shall see, Arjuna is repeatedly associated with Śiva, this suggests that Arjuna knows how to unite the left (the female side) with the right (the male side), like Śiva Ardhanārīśvara, “the lord who is half woman.” To win the Śakti as his bride, Arjuna can thus

31. There is a parallel legend concerning Kāmākṣī, “love eyes,” the goddess of Kanchipuram, telling that she obtained “lovely eyes” or “eyes of love” as a boon from Viṣṇu to win back the love of Śiva (Dave 1970, 1: 72; Shulman 1980a, 171–72).

32. Cf. n. 25: the shooting of the mango causes the obliteration of the third eye of the Pāṇḍi king.

33. In *Mbh.* 1.179.16, Arjuna shoots five arrows, a conventional symbol of the five senses and thus of Kāma, through the rotating target.

draw on this "left-handed" knowledge.³⁴ One is, of course, reminded of the *vāmamārga*, the left-handed tantric worship of the goddess, which involves both the eating of fish as one of the goddess's sacramental symbols and sexual intercourse with her ritual surrogate.

In any case, Arjuna is able not only to hit the fish target, but to overcome a kind of duality. With his "left-handed" knowledge, he is able to see and take direct aim on the fish image as it is reflected in the mirror, which itself represents the water (or oil: see Narasimhachar 1977, 12) below him. From here it is but a matter of recognizing the use made of conventional Indian symbols.

Water is a symbol of flux, *saṃsāra*, and *māyā* (oil seems to be but an intensification of the power of the distortion inherent in *māyā*), and is of course where fish normally appear. The mirror (a contribution of the dramatists) brings into focus what one sees when one looks past inversion, into the mind, to perceive the still center, the self, amid the turmoil of the *saṃsāric* world of movement.³⁵ Arjuna's knowledge thus enables him to see beyond *māyā*, even while looking into it. His arrow penetrates not the "illusory" image in the mirror or water, but the fish above, in the realm of the absolute. For what is the rotating *cakra*, with its spokes through which Arjuna must shoot, but the *Brahmacakra*, the wheel of the universe? And what is beyond this wheel but the realm of salvation and divine union, here, in Arjuna's case, with the goddess?

Just as Śiva arrests the darting "fish eyes" of *Minākṣī* and turns them into the unblinking eyes of divine love, so Arjuna penetrates to the fish (or even fish eye) at the still center of the absolute, the point at which his own union with *Draupadī* "truly" (for in the *Draupadī* cult at least, *Draupadī* will remain a virgin on earth) takes place. In this regard, it is fitting that such an ultimate union with the goddess should involve the symbol of the fish. In South Indian folklore, including that of the *Draupadī* cult, Śiva and Arjuna are themselves both bearers of "fish marks"—both having such marks on their backs, and Arjuna also on his right side (*valatu pakkam*

34. Cf. Biardeau CR 89, 224: "he who has his *śakti*—wife—at his left." This "knowledge" does not, however, imply that he shoots the arrow with his left hand in the play. He does not, and my Terukkūttu informants were unfamiliar with him having any special knowledge connected with his name *Savyasācin* enabling him to draw the bow.

35. On mirrors and water reflection in various Hindu and Buddhist soteriologies, see Naudou 1966, esp. 63–64 (in the *Upaniṣads*); Wayman 1971 and 1974, 253–57 (on the "mirror-like knowledge" in *Yogācāra* Buddhism); Keith 1975, 107 (in *Sāṃkhya*).

maccarēkai)³⁶—like their feminine counterparts. For them to seek out or marry “fish mark”—bearing women is thus an image of the feminine completion of their masculine divine natures.

A second interpretation of the maccayantiram does not require so many tantric leaps but retains the basic cosmological structure of the first. As is well known, in Tamil the word *miṇ* means both “fish” and “star.” The etymology for this association has old Dravidian roots and is reflected widely in Dravidian languages. Both fish and stars (and also lightning, *minnal*,³⁷ and of course eyes) flash, glitter, twinkle, and shine: basic meanings of the Tamil verb *miṇ* (see Burrow and Emeneau 1961, 326–27). I would suggest that these two meanings are condensed in Draupadī’s elevated fish. Moreover, one can propose an identification for the star. Villiputūr’s description of the scene at Draupadī’s marriage fire provides the key: “She entered repeatedly in the very hot loving fire which gave birth to her, a chaste lady like the north star [*vaṭamiṇ nīkar karpinālai*].” The north star represents Draupadī’s chastity.

The Tamil north star is not, however, the pole star, as one might think. It is, as the commentators on Villi recognize, the star Arundhati (Tamil Aruntati), situated in the Big Dipper beside the star at the middle of the handle known as Vasiṣṭha (Tamil Vacīṣṭan), Arundhati’s husband. At her marriage, Draupadī’s chastity is thus compared to that of Arundhati, the proverbial chaste wife. In India the constellation of the Big Dipper is known as the Seven Ṛṣis, and it is customary at Hindu marriages for the couple to be taken out at night to observe the stars of Vasiṣṭha and Arundhati, the models of marital fidelity. For the chaste Draupadī, object of all desires, the elevated fish is thus probably a paradoxical evocation of Arundhati’s star, the symbol of feminine chastity.

36. Tanikācala Mutaliyār 1979, 59. The beautiful fish on Arjuna’s back (*mutukilmaccam aticuntaram*; Naṭeṇa Kirāmaṇiyar 1979, 46; cf. Shulman 1980a, 125)—a molelike sign to Pavaḷakkoṭi that her would-be seducer is indeed Arjuna—reminds one of the still surviving Telugu and Kannada folk traditions, traceable to tenth-century Andhra and most fully enriched in Hoysala-period sculptures, that when Śiva wrestled with Arjuna he allowed Arjuna to surmount him so that Pārvaṭi, standing behind Arjuna, could see a special auspicious mark or “mole” on Arjuna’s back. The theme has been richly studied by Nagaraja Rao (1979, 18, 34–62, 68, 85–88), but he does not indicate the nature of the “mole.” The story appears to have had little impact in Tamilnadu, and it has no play in Draupadī cult versions of “Arjuna’s Tapas” (see chap. 12). If this “mole” is a fish, we have another context in which Arjuna is famed for this trait, and a striking multiform of Śiva’s visit to Kṛpī.

37. Cf. Arjuna’s marriage to Minṇaloḷi, the lightning flash (chap. 10).

This Tamil north star also finds its place amid a vaster and more traditional Sanskritic cosmology.³⁸ The Seven Ṛṣis represent an image of cosmic stability and fidelity to ordered movement (see Hildebeitel 1977, 345–46; Kern 1869, 85–87) as they revolve around the true north star called Dhruva (“the Fixed”; Tamil *vaṭa-turuvam*, “Northern Dhruva”). The latter defines the pivot of the cosmic wheel that Arjuna must penetrate to win Draupadī as his bride. It is quite likely that the Tamil identification of Arundhatī as the north star is metaphoric, through its symbolic proximity to Dhruva, rather than being a true astronomical substitute for it.

In any case, the Ṛṣi Dhruva (the pole star personified) is himself associated with a “fish” in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas*. He is one of four heavenly bodies who form the tail of the celestial porpoise (*śiśumāra*: Gangetic porpoise or dolphin, *Delphinus gangeticus*), which is identified in *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 2.9 and 12 as a form of Viṣṇu (see Wilson [1840] 1972, 196 n. 7). The *Mahābhārata* knows this *śiśumāra* star group not only as a form of Viṣṇu but as the father of Dhruva’s wife, Bhramī. The “Fixed” one’s wife, literally “She who wanders,” is thus the daughter of a fish. Again one finds reiterated the paradoxical conjunction of fixity and movement.

What is most intriguing, however, is that the *Mahābhārata* hints at a connection between this fish and the marriage of Draupadī. Normally, the epic poets give Kāmpilyā as the name for the capital of Southern Pañcāla, the remaining portion of the kingdom over which Draupadī’s father, Drupada, rules after his humiliation by Droṇa. But at Draupadī’s Svayaṃvara, the city, for this one time only, is called “The City of the Śiśumāra”: “With the roar of the surging ocean, all the citizens approached Śiśumārapuram, and the kings assembled there” (*Mbh.* 1.176.15).³⁹ One is reminded of the myth of the descent of the heavenly Ganges, the celestial Milky Way, whose similarly deafening fall is attended by “shoals of fish, tortoises, and hosts of porpoises” (*śiśumāraganaiḥ*; *Rām.* 1,*924; *apud* 1.42.7). Here again one must think of heavenly fish, and of the symbolically charged correlations between fish and stars—and the sky and the ocean—that one finds in both of the Sanskrit epics.

38. I thank Randy Kloetzli for sharing his insights in these matters.

39. Agrawala (1939, 168–69) notes the variant readings *śi(ṃ)śumāra-giri* and *-śiraḥ*, favoring the latter—the least common—and interpreting it as an architectural term for a *makara-toraṇa*, a “‘makara’ motif represented with coiled fish-tail and a gaping mouth” on the architrave of a gateway (as known from second century B.C. Sunga sculptures, and presumably earlier sculptures in wood). *Śiraḥ*, “head,” could more simply be equivalent to *giri*, “peak.” In any case, whether it is the *śi(ṃ)śumāra*’s city, peak, or head, the approach of the citizens and kings is emphasized for its symbolic links with the surging and destructive turbulence of the ocean.

It is fascinating that the *Mahābhārata* should make this exceptional allusion to the śiśumāra in the unique setting of Draupadī's Svayaṃvara. Was the śiśumāra the emblem of the royal capital of Kāmpilyā, if not of its king, as the carp was for ancient Madurai and its Pandyan monarchs?⁴⁰ What did the epic poets have in mind when they described the matsyayantra as a "golden target" (*lakṣyam kāñcanam*) fixed to a moving and probably wheel-like (van Buitenen 1973, 349, 464) contraption (*yantra*) "built in the sky" (*vaihāyasam kārāyāmāsa*; *Mbh.* 1.176.10)? How old is the folk tradition that the golden target was a fish? Was this identification in any way influenced by the reference to the śiśumāra just after the description of the device and the target? We certainly cannot press such an identification on the epic poets, or suppose that the śiśumāra was ever the fish on the matsyayantra. But the epic evocation of the śiśumāra in connection with Draupadī's Svayaṃvara is consistent with other themes we have found. The name śiśumāra means "child-killer," and it is often translated as "crocodile." It is a strange note to touch for a marriage, and one thinks immediately of Draupadī's own doomed children. But there is also the entire Kṣatriya caste whose doom is predicted at her birth (1.155.44–45), and whose first defeat—a clear foreshadowing of its fate at Kurukṣetra—is the humiliation of the kings at the bending of the bow and their failure when they challenge its outcome. At the very least, the allusion to the śiśumāra already places the Svayaṃvara of Draupadī under the sign of the *matsya nyāya*, "the law of the fish."

40. There is an epic correlation between stars, royal ancestors, and heroes slain in battle (Hiltebeitel 1976, 340), and a widespread practice of feeding deceased kings by offerings to sacred carp (Moses 1922–23, 502; Das 1932, 99–100).

10 Additional Marriages

There is a *Mahābhārata* passage that makes brief mention of a tradition in which, in addition to marrying Draupadī, each of the Pāṇḍavas take at least one other wife and sire a son by her (*Mbh.* 1.90.83–89). But except for the marriages of Bhīma to Hiḍimbā and Arjuna to Subhadṛā, the passage in question mentions wives and sons who are otherwise unknown and omits two other marriages of Arjuna's, both producing sons, that the epic tells of elsewhere: his unions with Ulūpī and Citrāṅgadā. In any case, in the epic it is Arjuna, and secondarily Bhīma, who arouses interest for his amorous adventures and additions to the Pāṇḍava family. It is the same, but moreso (see appendix 1), in the Draupadī cult and its drama cycle.

We have, to be sure, observed in chapter 6 the anomalous myth in which Muttāl Rāvuttan's service to Draupadī is facilitated by Dharma-Yudhiṣṭhira's prior union with the otherwise unknown Muttālakkanni. But this seemingly local story has no currency in the Terukkūttu cycle. Within the cycle, however, the lore concerning Bhīma and Arjuna's liaisons is in various ways intensified. Indeed, there is a clear correlation between the cult's insistence on Draupadī's virginity and the enrichment of Bhīma and Arjuna's lovelife in other quarters.

A. Bhīma and Hiḍimbā

In Bhīma's case, it is not a question of increasing the number of wives, but of mythically deepening the resonances of his marriage to Hiḍimbā. In the play *Arakkumālikai*, "The Lacquer House," the Pāṇḍavas' escape from Duryodhana's firetrap takes them into the forest where Bhīma encounters the carnivorous and man-eating Rākṣasa siblings Hiḍimba and Hiḍimbā. There he kills the former and marries the latter. What is striking is that although the dra-

matists do know Hiḍimbā as Iṭumpavati, a variant of her classical name, she answers to the name Kamalakkannī throughout the Terukkūttu cycle.¹ As Villi knows her as Iṭimpi, the name Kamalakkannī seems to be a Terukkūttu innovation. Moreover, another name for her in the dramas is Mummulaikkannī, “the three-breasted maiden” (see AM, 55–56). Both of these names are instructive. The name Mummulaikkannī quickly leads us to another multiform of the myth that introduces the three-breasted Taṭātakai-Mīnākṣī to Śiva. Hiḍimbā-Iṭumpavati has this name, as one would now expect, because she was born with three breasts. When she was five years old she performed tapas to Śiva, who gave her the boon (*varam*) that when she saw a husband fit for her, her third breast would disappear. Having now seen Bhīma, her third breast vanishes, and her ugliness is replaced by great beauty.² Moreover, her scent for human flesh turns to desire, and soon enough she convinces Bhīma to marry her.³ We need not dwell further on this well-interpreted theme (see Shulman 1980a, 202–9) except to note what the Terukkūttu cycle has accomplished by incorporating it. In the chapter 9, we saw that while Draupadī’s fish evokes a number of features of the wedding—or better, weddings—of Mīnākṣī, it does not, and cannot, invest Draupadī with Mīnākṣī’s three breasts. We now see that within the full mythology of the Draupadī cult, this theme is not absent. It is transposed onto Draupadī’s co-wife Hiḍimbā-Kamalakkannī. And just as the nuptial mythology of Mīnākṣī is split between Draupadī and Hiḍimbā, so is that of Śiva split between Arjuna and Bhīma.

As to the name Kamalakkannī, we have of course seen it before as that of the primary goddess who receives buffalo sacrifices at

1. Not only in *Arakkumālīkai* (AM) but in the rarely performed and apparently unpublished play *Matapīmaṇ-Malaiyukācuraṇ Caṇṭai*, “Maddened Bhīma’s Fight with Malaiyukācuraṇ,” which I observed in shortened form in January 1982. Malaiyukācuraṇ is a revenge-seeking son of Baka, and entirely a folk creation. When he defeats and imprisons Bhīma, the latter gets help from Kṛṣṇa, who then calls on Bhīma and Kamalakkannī’s son Ghaṭotkaca (living in the forest with his mother), who in turn calls on Draupadī, who finally defeats the demon by planting a thumb nail, letting it grow into a *tumpai* flower (traditionally worn by warriors going to war), and then killing the demon by attaching the flower to an arrow.

2. I have not seen this play. Information is from observing *Matapīmaṇ-Malaiyukācuraṇ Caṇṭai*, in which Kamalakkannī tells this story, and from further exchanges with my Terukkūttu informants.

3. Kamalakkannī’s argument has had echoes in recent scholarship: marriages between kings and Rākṣasīs (Arakkīs) are good for royal lineages, she says, as evidenced by the marriage of the Pāṇḍavas’ ancestor Yayāti with Śarmiṣṭhā, daughter of the Rākṣasa (in the epic he is an Asura, not a Rākṣasa) Vṛṣaparvan (Viṭayan; AM, 67). Cf. Defourny 1978, 107–37; Biardeau 1978, 132.

the Gingee Fort. Although my dramatist informants were unfamiliar with the Kamalakkann̄i of Gingee, it is likely that in earlier times she would have had greater regional renown. So there is some reason to suspect that this renaming of Hiḍimbā was initially motivated by Ceñciyamman-Kamalakkann̄i's once wider recognition. Let us recall that the *bali-pīṭham* outside her temple is incised with ram, buffalo, and human heads (see chap. 4, Sec. B): a natural local "fit" for the carnivorous and cannibalistic Hiḍimbā. Clearly, however, the two Kamalakkann̄is are different figures. The Gingee Fort Kamalakkann̄i is not, as far as I have found, ever represented with three breasts. Indeed, being the youngest and "angriest" of the seven sisters (she is also called Kōpakkann̄i, "Anger Maiden," and is set apart for this reason on the southern heights of the fort, where blood offerings can appease her), one would not expect her to be linked with such a myth, which seems to require a Śiva-like husband to make the third breast disappear. One could even say that insofar as the Gingee Fort Kamalakkann̄i is a form of the virgin Durgā, one should not expect her to have a husband at all. Thus all the more surprise to hear a well-placed local informant at Mēlaccēri—one Tankavelu Pandaram, who has a garden that supplies flowers for the Gingee bazaar and the Mēlaccēri Draupadī temple—tell the following story. The Gingee Fort Kamalakkann̄i is the widow of Acalammācuran̄, the demon of the Gingee Forest, whose hundred heads Draupadī severs, leaving the last to be held by Pōttu Rāja. As Draupadī decapitates her husband, Kamalakkann̄i protests that she will soon be a widow, and Draupadī replies that she too is like a widow in that she is a *kann̄i*; that is, one who has no sexual relations with her husband(s). This account thus tells not only how both goddesses take on this rather ambiguous *kann̄i* status, but how their two cults are related.⁴ It is tempting to put this narrative together with some of the other fragments I have found of the mythologies of Kamalakkann̄i and the Gingee Fort. Recalling that the demon Draupadī conquers is sometimes specifically identified as the demon of the Gingee Fort, and not just of the Mēlaccēri Forest, should we suspect that Kamalakkann̄i's "anger" results from the killing of the Gingee Fort demon in the role of her hus-

4. Let us recall the axial relationship of Kamalakkann̄i's temple to the south of the Gingee Fort with that of Draupadī's temple to the north. It is as if in linking the Rākṣasī Hiḍimbā with the name Kamalakkann̄i, the mythology of the dramas picks up on an implicit, though perhaps never operative, complementarity between the two temples: Draupadī's to the north "protecting the kingdom," and the southward oriented temple of Kamalakkann̄i protecting against Rākṣasas, a traditional function of the "southern fire" (*dakṣiṇāgni*) of the Vedic sacrifice.

band? So far, no informant has put the pieces together in this way. Let us just recall, however, that we have met another Draupadī cult variant about the wife of Acalammācuraṇ, in which under the name Ceṇpakavaḷḷi she becomes the parrot on Draupadī's hand (chap. 5, sec. B). There is thus no stable Draupadī cult connection between Draupadī and the Kamalakkanni of Gingee Fort such as there is between Draupadī and Kamalakkanni-Hiḍimbā, the wife of Bhīma. But at least from the singular Mēlaccēri perspective of Tankavelu Pandaram, it is striking that Draupadī has a kind of seniority over both of these Kamalakkannis, and further, that the wife of the demon she kills with the help of Pōttu Rāja (the "Buffalo King") should be the goddess who accepts buffalo sacrifices in the Gingee Fort.

B. Arjuna's "Pilgrimage"

In the case of Arjuna's amours, it is not just a matter of mythical deepening but of numerical proliferation. Moreover, Bhīma's marriage to Hiḍimbā comes before Draupadī's Svayamvara. It involves no "stepping out" on Draupadī, to whom Bhīma is ever fiercely attendant. In contrast, all of Arjuna's liaisons occur after the Svayamvara and involve an element of amorous wanderlust.

There is, however, also a certain complementarity between Draupadī's multiple husbands and Arjuna's multiple wives. For Draupadī, the five Pāṇḍavas—"five former Indras" in the epic, "five kings" (*aivar rājakkal*) in the oft-repeated phrase of the Terukkūttu—represent the diffusion of the royal ideal into five aspects. For Arjuna, the "central" Pāṇḍava and ideal king, the attainment of multiple wives represents alliances with different realms (both earthly and subterranean), contributing to an image of universal kingship.⁵ In the *Mahābhārata* he has four wives, the number required in Vedic literature for a king who performs the Aśvamedha sacrifice (Gehrts 1975, 186–87), which confers paramouncy. Moreover, Arjuna attains his three additional wives through a kind of sexual *digvijaya* ("conquest of the regions"), winning one in the north (Ulūpī), one in the east (Citrāṅgadā), and after an interlude in the south where he chastely frees five Apsaras from a curse that has turned them into crocodiles (*grāhāḥ*; *Mbh.* 1.208–9), he wins one more in the west (Subhadrā).

5. One must follow Biardeau (1978, 111–204) here, especially in the context of the Draupadī cult in which Arjuna's centrality and ideal royalty are most emphatic. There is still, however, more to say about the complementary "royalties" of Arjuna and Dharma.

In the Terukkūttu cycle, and in Tamil ballad literature on the *Mahābhārata*, the number of Arjuna's wives has grown. When asked the exact number, my two main informants said seven. But when I asked about others familiar from their dramas, I was told with a shrug and a smile that no one really knows their full number. I will discuss nine, the total known to me. Rather than treat each bride and her story separately, however, I will look at them for the most part collectively. This will have the advantage of calling attention to the considerable overlap in their dramas, in which some themes are carried forward from the epic, and others elaborated from South Indian mythology.

In the *Mahābhārata* all, and in the Terukkūttu half, of Arjuna's extra marriages occur during the "pilgrimage" he takes after he has violated an agreement with his brothers concerning the proprieties of their relations with Draupadī.⁶ Arjuna's penalty is to undertake five years (twelve in the epic) in exile as a *brahmacārin*, or religious student. Normally this would require celibacy, but Arjuna's *brahmacarya* seems the occasion—even in the *Mahābhārata*—for the development of a humorous folklore on the temptations of this "stage of life." In fact, according to Subramanian, "Arjuna's 'pilgrimage' has come down the ages as a Rabelaisian joke" (1967, 55). The material is thus ideal for a return to the lighter side of the Terukkūttu, marking another change in tone from the more serious "Garlanding of Draupadī."

Arjuna is devastatingly handsome: in the "Garlanding of Pavalakkoti," he only has to "show his teeth" (*pallai kātṭi*), and the heroine faints (Naṭēca Kirāmaṇiyar 1979 [henceforth APM], 32; cf. Shulman 1980a, 125). Time after time he covets an "impossible" match and calls upon Kṛṣṇa; either or both of them don a disguise (bereaved wife, gypsy woman, hunter, Brahman, *saṁnyāsin*, messenger); they overcome all obstacles including efforts to jail or kill them (by the girl if she is an "Amazon," or else by her relatives); and finally Kṛṣṇa's last trick works and Arjuna gets the girl, in one case—the "Garlanding of Alli"—even while she sleeps.⁷

6. These are not sexual relations, according to my informants. In their privacy, Draupadī only serves food to her husbands.

7. *Arccuṇaṇi Alliyai Mālaiyiṭṭa Alli Nāṭakam* (1981; henceforth AAM, 60–63): it is while Alli sleeps that Kṛṣṇa performs the wedding ceremony and Arjuna ties the tāli. It is suggested that he sleeps with her, as he does in the ballad on this marriage, in the form of a snake (see Shulman 1980a, 125–26). Does this mean that Arjuna adds the disreputable *paiśāca* form of marriage to his repertoire? In the "Garlanding of Pavalakkoti," Arjuna takes the form of a swan to get into the heroine's bedroom so he can croon his love to her while she sleeps (APM, 48–54). But he marries her later, thanks to another trick.

Table 7. Arjuna's Additional Wives

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1. Alli, Amazon ruler of Madurai, daughter of a Pandyan king of the Vanniya caste (*AAM*, 4), a "new" marriage (that is, unknown to the classical epic tradition) during Arjuna's "pilgrimage."
 2. Pavaḷakkoṭi, Amazon ruler of Cēramputēcam, another new marriage during the pilgrimage.
 3. Cittiraṅkaṇṇi, Amazon ruler of an uncertain kingdom, married during the pilgrimage, as in the classical epic.
 4. Ulūpī, another classical pilgrimage marriage.
 5. Subhadṛā (Cupattirai), sister of Kṛṣṇa, from "Northern Madurai" (Vaṭamaturāpuri-paṭṭanam), the final classical pilgrimage bride.
 6. Bhogavatī (Pōkavati), a Rākṣasī (Arakki) from Pātāla-loka (the Underworld), daughter of Pātālaketu; married during Rājasūya. She also has Amazon features.
 7. Miṇṇaloḷi, "Lightning Light," sister of Iṭimaṇṇan ("Thunder King") and daughter of Mēkarājaṇ ("Cloud King"); encountered during Arjuna's tapas; married thereafter.
 8. Elammā, seeks to marry Arjuna during his tapas, then marries him at its conclusion.
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A logical reconstruction of the order of these marriages, keeping in mind Arjuna's classical "pilgrimage" route and the interior references in the plays, would be as follows: Ulūpī, Cittiraṅkaṇṇi (or Cittiraṅkatai, the epic Citrāṅgadā), Subhadṛā, Pavaḷakkoṭi, Bhogavatī, and either Miṇṇaloḷi or Ellammā. In "The Garlanding of Pavaḷakkoṭi," Arjuna is already married to Subhadṛā and Alli. But there has been no consistent pattern to the marriages, and a glance back at table 6 will show that although Subhadṛā's marriage is usually performed first, it twice occurs after Alli's. My Terukkūttu informants, however, gave the order outlined in table 7, to which I add a few notations.⁸

Arjuna thus adds five wives (numbers 1 to 5 in table 7) during his pilgrimage, rather than the traditional three. The two extras, Alli and Pavaḷakkoṭi, have much in common, and both seem to derive their Amazon characteristics in part from the traditional epic figure of Citrāṅgadā, and in part from Mīnākṣī.⁹ All five, including Ulūpī and Subhadṛā, were said by informants to come from Tam-

8. According to *Mbh.* 1.208.13–14, the kingdom that Citrāṅgadā-Cittiraṅkaṇṇi (number 3) rules is Maṇalūra; cf. Shulman 1980a, 210.

9. For a rewarding analysis of the connections between these stories, see Shulman 1980a, 125–26, 197, 209–11. Possibly the Alli and Pavaḷakkoṭi stories were popular in Madurai-Pandyan folklore before they became attached to the Terukkūttu cycle of the Draupadī festivals.

ilnadu. Thus the "Northern Madurai" of Subhadṛā was said to be the town by that name in Dindigul Taluk, Madurai District:¹⁰ that is where she is said to be from, even though Kṛṣṇa takes Arjuna to meet her at Dvārakā, which apparently retains its northern locale in Gujarat. She thus joins Draupadī, as well as Ulūpī, as in some fashion a "nativized" Tamilian, for Draupadī is of course born in Gingee.

One thus finds a certain geographical symbolism here, though different from that in the *Mahābhārata*. Draupadī is from the center (Gingee as Hāstinapura), Alli is from the south, and Subhadṛā from a north that is now actually south of Gingee. But beyond this, a cosmic structure is also evident. Arjuna marries Pōkavati, a princess from the underworld, to secure the wealth needed for the Pāṇḍavas to perform the expensive Rājasūya. His marriage to "Lightning Light," Minṇaloḷi, the daughter of the Cloud King and sister of the Thunder King, is surely a link with the heavenly forces that guarantee prosperous rainfalls. He is thus in effect a symbolic king of Tamilnadu, of the four directions, and of the resources of the three worlds (heaven, earth, and underworld). Indeed, it is in this expansion of Arjuna's zones of conquest that the Draupadī cult *Mahābhārata* deals most directly with the theme of movement through the triple world.¹¹

Concerning prominence among Arjuna's wives, it is clear that next to Draupadī, Subhadṛā is the most important. This is as it is in the *Mahābhārata*. In the Draupadī cult, Subhadṛā is the only co-wife to be represented iconically, frequently in the form of a wooden processional image, and occasionally—as at Mēlaccēri (see plate 1)—of a *mūlavigraha* (a stone image fixed in the inner sanctum) set

10. These actors seem to have no sense that the "northern Madurai" is actually Kṛṣṇa's and Subhadṛā's North Indian birthplace of Mathurā, after which the "southern Mathurā" or Madurai seems to have taken its name (see Hardy 1983, 156). One is reminded of the variant traditions of North and South Gingeess (see above, chap. 5, sec. A).

11. Frasca's notion (1984, 161–63) that the sequence of dramas moves through a sort of sine curve from earth (Draupadī's marriage to disrobing) to heaven ("Arjuna's Tapas," "Slaughter of Kicaka," and "Kṛṣṇa the Messenger"), and then back to earth (the war plays) is unconvincing. Only "Arjuna's Tapas" has a scene in heaven; there is nothing heavenly at all about "Slaughter of Kicaka"; and plays like "Kṛṣṇa the Messenger" involving "connections with the Tēvalōkam" (or heaven) also occur in the first ("Dice Match and Disrobing") and third ("Karna's Mokṣa") groups of so-called "earthly" dramas.

beside Draupadī. Her drama is also performed far more frequently than those of any of the other co-wives.¹²

As in the epic, Subhadrā's importance relies on her links to Kṛṣṇa. We have already observed that Draupadī is regarded as Kṛṣṇa's younger sister and noted that this relationship is one that she shares with many other South Indian goddesses. Most if not all of Draupadī's co-wives are likewise referred to as Kṛṣṇa's younger sisters.¹³ Mythologically and theologically, it is a title with two primary referents. One is the scene of Kṛṣṇa's birth, where the goddess takes parallel birth as Yaśodā's baby daughter, is killed by Kāṁsa after she and the baby Kṛṣṇa are exchanged, and then reappears in the sky in her virginal, destructive form (she is Durgā in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 10.2 and 4) to announce Kāṁsa's death (see chap. 9, sec. A). The other is the pervasive South Indian theme, most famous from the Madurai Mīnākṣī temple and its festival, that Viṣṇu attends the marriage of Mīnākṣī and Śiva as the goddess's brother, and becomes through this marriage the brother-in-law of Śiva (see Hudson 1977; 1982, 139–41). What is striking, for our present purposes, is that these two contexts project two different but complementary images of the relation between Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu and the goddess. In the first, where the goddess is fierce and virginal, their collaboration is oriented toward destruction. In the Draupadī cult, this potential for violence is what lies behind the relationship between Kṛṣṇa and his "sister" Draupadī.¹⁴ But in the second, where Viṣṇu in effect hands the goddess as his sister to Śiva in marriage, his role is to give his blessing to an auspicious union that will bring further blessings to all. It is a rapport of this type that defines the relationship between Kṛṣṇa and Subhadrā. Moreover, she and she alone of Draupadī's co-wives is Kṛṣṇa's real sister.¹⁵

12. After Subhadrā's marriage (18 performances) comes Allī's (6), Citrankaṇṇi's and Pavaḷakkoṭi's (5), and Pōkavati's (2). According to my informants, Miṇṇaloḷi is occasionally requested as an extra play, but is not normally performed in the festival cycle. Frasca (1984, 292) mentions a play on the marriage of Nākakkāṇṇi-Ulūpi, but I have found no incidence of its performance.

13. E.g., Ulūpi in *Ararāṇ Kaṭapali Nāṭakam* (1977, 46–49) and Kamalakkāṇṇi-Hiḍimbā in *Matapīmaṇ-Malaiyukācūraṇ Caṇṭai* (see n. 1). Indeed, the relation extends implicitly to all the co-wives: in part because they also become co-wives of Subhadrā, who is actually Kṛṣṇa's sister.

14. In the *Mahābhārata*, Draupadī is not called Kṛṣṇa's sister. But the rapport between them is still represented by other symbolic means (see Hildebeitel 1985b).

15. *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 9.24.55 (Tagare 1976, 1252) makes her the daughter of Vasudeva and Devakī, Kṛṣṇa's own parents.

That Kṛṣṇa should help Arjuna to marry Subhadrā is of the highest significance.¹⁶ By name, she is the "very blessed" or "very auspicious," and her traditional epic role is to bear Arjuna the son, Abhimanyu (Apimannan) through whom the Pāṇḍavas' royal line will miraculously (that is, thanks to Kṛṣṇa) survive the eighteen-day Kurukṣetra war. According to Dandapani, my sculptor informant, in the Draupadī cult she is represented iconically by the open lotus in her right hand, a symbol of sexual ripeness and fertility that stands in contrast to the closed lotus bud, symbolizing virginity, that one sometimes sees in the right hand of Draupadī (see plate 7).

But most important, Subhadrā represents the fusion of the cowherd-Kṣatriya theme as it relates Draupadī, Kṛṣṇa, and Arjuna. In the epic, when Arjuna brings Subhadrā to meet Draupadī for the first time, Subhadrā follows Arjuna's urgent bidding and changes from wearing the red silk garment suitable for a queen (Biardeau 1978, 135–36) "into the dress/disguise of a cowmaid" (*gopālikāvapuḥ*; *Mbh.* 1.213.17). Subhadrā's subordination to Draupadī as the junior wife to the senior wife thus holds the implication of the subordination of a cowherd to a Kṣatriya element, just as Kṛṣṇa abandons the rustic setting of his "water sports" with the Gopīs to enter into the world of the epic heroes. And just as Kṛṣṇa the Kṣatriya remains a "protector of cattle," Subhadrā's disguise is also a clear reminder that within this Kṣatriya world, the cowherd dimension is still present (see chap. 9, sec. A). Until the end of the war, Subhadrā's continued service to Draupadī (see especially *Mbh.* 9.4.16–20) will involve the dedication of the auspicious to the inauspicious, the regenerative to the dark and destructive (see Hildebeitel 1985b, 74–76). But after the war, it is the auspicious and regenerative, sustained through Subhadrā, that will triumph. Her service to Draupadī only parallels the more evident services of Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna. That she should don a cowmaid disguise in her own self-subordinating role is thus a strong symbolic reminder that the service she performs jointly with her brother retains this pastoral component. Similarly, in the Draupadī cult, Subhadrā may be from Kṛṣṇa's "Kṣatriya" side and the Gopīs from his rustic youth. But as far as the actors and audience are concerned, she and the Gopīs are all Yādava-Kōṇār ladies.

16. The play *Cupattirai Mālaiyīṭu* relies for its story on a version known to Villiputtūr ultimately from the southern recension of the *Mahābhārata* (*Ādi-parvan*, app. 1, 114): Arjuna must disguise himself as an ascetic to deceive Balarāma (who wants Subhadrā to marry Duryodhana) and get close enough to Subhadrā to abduct her.

Here one will of course be reminded that such themes are of special interest to two of the three castes most prominently involved in the Draupadī cult: the Vaṇṇiyars and Kōṇārs. For while one finds cowherd and Kṣatriya components fused in both castes, there is also a subordination, within the cult, of the Kōṇār-Yādava herdsmen (former kings of Gingee) to the Vahnikula Kṣatriya Vaṇṇiyars (Śūdra farmers). Similarly, in the *Mahābhārata*, Kṛṣṇa has at his disposal a group of cowherd-warriors, the Gopa-Nārāyaṇas, whom he delivers over to fight on the Kaurava side to balance his own service to the Pāṇḍavas as Arjuna's charioteer. These cowherd-warriors—"ever-raised in Gokula" (*gokule nityasaṃvṛddhāḥ*; *Mbh.* 8.4.39)—thus materialize Kṛṣṇa's omnipresence on the battlefield (see Biardeau 1978, 207–8).¹⁷

Within the drama cycle, however, Subhadrā's symbolism is to a certain extent replicated by that of Alli, the most important of Arjuna's "new" wives. One is from "Northern Madurai," the other from Madurai proper. Like Subhadrā, Alli is associated with the lotus: indeed, she is born from and named after this flower, and Arjuna keeps pining away for her near water tanks (*AAM*, 22–25, 31). Both wives seem to be prototypes for varying forms of strong sexual attraction: Alli the distant and near-impossible conquest, Subhadrā the almost overeager bride, loving consort and companion.¹⁸ Both also give birth to sons, who each in his own way provides for the continuity of the Pāṇḍava line: Subhadrā's Abhimanyu, father of Parikṣit; and Alli's Pulantiraṇ, father of Ciṇṇa Arccuṇaṇ ("Little Arjuna").¹⁹ According to my dramatist informants, Pulantiraṇ is Arjuna's only "new" son, joining the traditional epic figures of Abhimanyu-Apimanṇaṇ, Aravāṇ, and Cittiraṇkaṇṇi's son Babhruvāhana (Pappiruvākaṇaṇ). Through Alli, he thus provides Arjuna's folk legacy to Madurai, the Pandyan kingdom, and the South (see also chap. 5; sec. B). In other words, Alli and Subhadrā represent southern and "northern" variants of the lotus-auspicious, son-bearing, and dynasty-continuing wife, who contrasts so mark-

17. See chap. 3, n. 6; chap. 5, n. 26; chaps. 5, 7, 9, 14, and above, n. 3, for related components of this folk-classical complex.

18. *Arccuṇaṇ Tirukkaliyāṇamennuṃ Cupattirai Mālaiyitu Nāṭakam* (henceforth *CM*) states that Subhadrā had wanted to marry Arjuna since she was five (1972, 46). See also the amusing byplay between Arjuna and Subhadrā in "Garlanding of Pavaḷakkoṭi" (*APM*, 20–24), where she distrusts his motives for going to see Alli, who will inadvertently set him on the path to Pavaḷakkoṭi.

19. Pulantiraṇ appears in several plays, including "Garlanding of Pavaḷakkoṭi," *Pulantiraṇ Kaḷavu* (1973), and *Ciṇṇa Arccuṇaṇ Caṇṭai* (Nākarattiṇa Kavunṭar and Vi-rappaṭaiyācci 1977).

edly with the dark, virginal, threatening, and ultimately barren figure of Draupadī.

As to the number of Arjuna's wives, though my chief informants gave seven (with Draupadī included) as the total, Minṇaloḷi figures in Terukkūttu tradition as a definite eighth. There is supposed to be a play about her marriage, though I did not record its title and it is apparently unpublished. She also appears in an additional play titled *Arccuṇaṇ Kuravañci* (Nārāyaṇacāmitācaṇ 1978; henceforth MAK) in which she is not only the eighth wife in a total of eight, but one of Draupadī's seven "sisters." This play, well known to my Terukkūttu informants but not mentioned as part of their (or anyone else's) festival repertoire, is worth a brief summary.

A typical epic spinoff and dramatic farce, creating new situations for well-known characters (including a near fight between Abhimanyu and Aravāṇ), the play focuses on the issue of Minṇaloḷi's inclusion among the co-wives. After a quarrel with Arjuna (who has ignored her for ten years), Minṇaloḷi locks him out of her room (cf. Shulman 1980a, 192–211; on the "sealed shrine" motif). Arjuna shouts that he will never come to her again in his beautiful "own form" (*cuyarūpam*; MAK, p. 17). Then, when Draupadī invites all her seven "sisters" to perform a pūjā to the Ganges (that is, the "village goddess" Keṅkaiyamman), Minṇaloḷi tells her co-wives of her plight and all agree to refuse sexual relations with Arjuna until he goes to Minṇaloḷi. Arjuna tries his charm on each of his wives—except Draupadī, with whom such things are already ruled out—and, meeting nothing but frustration, is finally reconciled with Minṇaloḷi.

In Arjuna's marriages to Draupadī and her "sisters," one can hardly miss the implication that the co-wives have taken on the mantle of the "seven sisters," "seven maidens," and "seven mothers" one meets in various contexts all over India. Indeed, one finds Draupadī linked quite variously with this configuration in the ritual, iconography, and mythology of her temples. I began this chapter recalling her tenuous but intriguing tie with the seven sisters of the Gingee Fort. Similarly, at the Blackpalli Dharmarāja temple in Bangalore, seven other "Śaktis" are brought from their temples to join Draupadī at her festival. And at Virapāṇṭi, the "Seven Virgins" are represented within her temple compound by seven small rectangular slabs in front of Muttāl Rāvuttan's horses.²⁰ It is no

20. Cf. Whitehead 1921, 30–31, on Draupadī as one of eight Śaktis; also *ibid.*, 26–27, 32. Recall also the eight Lakṣmīs worshipped with Draupadī on the fifth day of the current Dindigul festival (chap. 3, sec. C). Pōta Rāju's relation to the goddesses of village Andhra is defined in terms of their being his seven sisters (see Elmore 1915, 18–31; Eisenhauer 1985, 17; Herrenschildt 1986, 161).

doubt significant that the play should subordinate these seven sisters to the virginal figure of Draupadī, yet do so in a way in which Draupadī herself guarantees the sexual fulfillment of the sister most intimately connected with the fertilizing symbolism of the lightning, thunder, and rains.

Finally, through his many seductions and liaisons, Arjuna's escapades hold numerous reminders of Śiva. For one thing, one should not miss a certain parallelism in the marriages of Mīnākṣī and Subhadrā: in the one Viṣṇu gives his sister to Śiva; in the other Kṛṣṇa gives his sister to Arjuna. As the erotic celibate, the Brahmacārin Arjuna also shows affinities with Śiva the "erotic ascetic." Thus he asks Kṛṣṇa in the "Garlanding of Subhadrā": "If I take on the disguise of a *saṃnyāsi*, then how can I get married" (CM, 15)? It is much like some of the paradoxical questions Śiva asks himself as he ponders his fascination with Pārvatī (see O'Flaherty 1973, 6). There are also iconographic reminders of Śiva: not only does Arjuna have a beautiful "fish mark" on his back, but snakes sent by Allī to kill him form an "umbrella" over his head (AAM, 46; cf. Shulman 1980a, 49). Through all this Arjuna reminds one not only of the Śiva reflected in classical Hindu mythology, but of the Śiva whose frequently dangerous marriages with dark local virgin goddesses are told with such persistency and variety in the *sthālapurāṇas* of Tamilnadu's temples (see Shulman 1980a). In this, as in the symbolism of their marriage, we find deepening mythical intimations that the dark and virginal Draupadī might have her moments of special union with this most "experienced," and yet ascetically tempered, of her five husbands.

11

The Two Sabhās: “The Rājasūya Sacrifice” and “Dice Match and Disrobing”

Once Arjuna has returned from his pilgrimage round of marital conquests, the drama cycle, passing over certain well-known epic episodes,¹ moves directly into the incidents of the *Mahābhārata*'s *Sabhā Parvan*, “The Book of the Assembly Hall.” As recent scholarship has shown, however, this parvan is in fact the tale of two sabhās: the one the Pāṇḍavas build in their new capital of Indra-prastha to host their Rājasūya sacrifice, and the one at Hāstinapura to which the Kauravas invite the Pāṇḍavas to the disastrous game of dice. Nowhere else does the classical epic reveal its construction more clearly as a game of mirrors (see Biardeau 1985a, 19–32), for not only do these two sabhās reflect each other—each representing one half of the divided kingdom—but the two episodes themselves, each superficially autonomous, constitute the two halves of one sacrificial scenario. As van Buitenen was the first to recognize in this connection (1975, 3–30; cf. Hildebeitel 1976a, 86–101), a canonically performed Rājasūya is not complete without a concluding dice match in which the sacrificing king is supposed to be victorious. Thus even though the Pāṇḍavas' Rājasūya is said to be complete, insofar as there is no mention that it includes a dice match, the poets imply that this component of the rite is left for the Kauravas, the other half of the divided family.

The two *Sabhā Parvan* dramas thus build upon a fundamental complementarity. To be sure, they throw no more light upon the subtleties of the Vedic Rājasūya. But they do enrich the linkages between the two episodes. Moreover, according to my two main

1. Curiously, there is no play about Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa clearing the land for the Pāṇḍavas new palace by helping Agni burn the Khāṇḍava Forest. This episode may have proved indifferent because its great fire—an image of the Pralaya and the fiery war to come (see Biardeau 1978, 137–46; Hildebeitel 1984a, 7)—has no clear link with Draupadī. But the episode was mentioned in a performed version of “Dice Match and Disrobing,” though with no mention of the fire (see Frasca 1984, 368).

Terukkūttu informants, the concluding scenes of "The Rājasūya Sacrifice" are indispensable for understanding the background for "Dice Match and Disrobing." I thus offer a brief discussion of the major "innovations" of the former play—most of which concern Draupadī—before turning to "Dice Match and Disrobing," the centerpiece of the Terukkūttu cycle.

A. *Irājacūya Yākam*, "The Rājasūya Sacrifice"

For the most part *Irājacūya Yākam* (1981; henceforth *IY*) follows the classical story, which I outline below.² The Rājasūya is traditionally the Vedic rite that confers universal sovereignty. Dharma's pretensions to preeminence and his eventual "completion" of the ceremony are what rankle Duryodhana. In the drama, however, this traditional purpose is muted, and Dharma is told by the trouble-stirring Ṛṣi Nārada that he should perform the rite to elevate the Pāṇḍavas' father, Pāṇḍu, to the world of Indra.³ Dharma then confers with Draupadī, who tells him to consult with her elder brother, Kṛṣṇa.⁴ Kṛṣṇa arrives and tells Dharma he can do the sacrifice, but not before disposing of Jarāsandha (Carācantaṇ). Kṛṣṇa's reasons vary. In the performed version, he says that Jarāsandha's riches will solve the problem of paying for the expensive rite. This innovative explanation also provides the pretext for the further novelty of the "Marriage of Pōkavati," in which the price for the Rājasūya is obtained, at Kṛṣṇa's suggestion, by Arjuna's killing of the underworld demon Pātāla Arakkaṇ and his marriage to the demon's daughter. In the more classically oriented chapbook version, the expenses are met by the wealth obtained from the Pāṇḍavas' conquest of the four directions. But in both versions, Kṛṣṇa has a more fundamental reason for wanting to be rid of Jarāsandha. Jarāsandha has defeated him many times in battle. Moreover, having jailed hundreds of kings—360 in the chapbook, 299 out of the needed 300 in the performed version—Jarāsandha is preparing a collective human sacrifice (*naramēta yākam*) to Kālī (*IY*, 22–25). Let us note that the Sanskrit epic speaks only of 86 kings imprisoned on the way to offering 100, not to Kālī, but to

2. The full title is *Carācantaṇ Pimaṇālum Cicupālaṇ Kuruṣṇamūrttiyāl Miṇanta Irājacūyayāka Nāṭakam* (1981; henceforth *IY*). A shortened version of this play was observed in January 1981 at Pakkiripālaiyam.

3. Cf. *AM*, 18, 24: Duryodhana convinces the Pāṇḍavas to go to Vāraṇāvata-Banaras (see chap. 9, sec. C) on a similar pretext, to perform Pāṇḍu's death anniversary rites.

4. In the chapbook play he gets similar advice from Bhīma (*IY*, 12).

Śiva (*Mbh.* 2.14.16–19). More intriguingly, though, the oral version holds echoes of the conditions that Bhīma eliminates by the killing of Baka: the regular daily offering of a human sacrifice in Mun-nūrrumaṅkaḷam, “The Village of the Three Hundred.” It is Bhīma once again who is finally called on to fight Jarāsandha, defeating him in much the same manner he does Baka: in each case by tearing his opponent into two pieces that must be arranged in opposite directions, in Jarāsandha’s case to prevent him from reviving by their recombination (*IY*, 30–31; cf. chap. 8).

After the elimination of Jarāsandha and the return to Indra-prastha, the Rājasūya soon begins. It takes place in the yācacālai of the Pāṇḍavas’ sabhā. The turning point is reached when Bhīṣma, the venerable Kaurava elder, announces that Kṛṣṇa should be given the first offering of *tāmpūlam* (betel leaf, enclosing areca nut and lime). This acknowledges that Kṛṣṇa is the most honored guest present.⁵ Dharma follows this advice, but Śiśupāla (Cicupālaṇ), king of Cedi, rises in fury. How can this honor go to a mere herdsman (*itaiyan*, that is, a Kōṇār), a non-king, a stealer of curds? Moreover, he insults the Pāṇḍavas, questioning their father’s paternity and their common marriage to Draupadī (*IY*, 53–54). Finally Kṛṣṇa takes up his *cakra*, makes a lamp and incense offering to it, and severs Śiśupāla’s head. As in Villi (2.1.146) and certain Purāṇic accounts, Śiśupāla is none other than a reincarnation of the demons Hiraṇya and Rāvaṇa, born this third and last time as an enemy of Viṣṇu (*IY*, 61), whom he now joins—finally saved—in the Vai-kunṭha heaven.

To all this the performed version adds a most unexpected incident. Kṛṣṇa now holds his finger in pain. When he threw the *cakra*, it cut his finger. Out comes Draupadī. Holding the endpiece or border (*muntāṇai*) of the portion of her saree that covers her shoulders, she offers it to Kṛṣṇa to stanch the blood. Delighted with her show of compassion, he promises that should she ever need help, he will find a way to return her favor in kind. The allusion is of course to his replenishment of her sarees in “Dice Match and Dis-robing.”⁶ Indeed, it is a dark foreshadowing, for Draupadī will be

5. This detail interprets a traditional gift-offering within the epic Rājasūya as a familiar village custom (see van Buitenen 1975, 22).

6. Peterson (1986a, 11), drawing on Wadley (1976, 158) to discuss brother-sister reciprocity, cites a North Indian variant that is told in connection with the ceremony of sisters tying *rākhī* (a protective string) around their brother’s wrist: “One time Bhagavan Krishna’s hand was cut and bleeding. When Dropadi saw this she immediately tied a piece of cloth from her dhoti on her brother’s hand. Because of this tying, Shri Krishna saved Dropadi’s honor at the time of Dusharsan’s taking her sari.” The Rājasūya setting is not stipulated, but one sign suggests that rather

dragged into the gambling hall in her one garment stained with menstrual blood, to be humiliated before the same kings who now attend the Rājasūya.

There is, however, a variant of Kṛṣṇa's promise that betrays a lighter tone. It was narrated by several sources, both from within the Draupadī cult (most notably the pāratyār Brameesa Mudaliyar) and from outside it (K. Mahadevan, a popular lecturer on the *Rāmāyaṇa*):

Once while the Pāṇḍavas and Kṛṣṇa were swimming in a tank, wearing only their loincloths [*kōmaṇams*, colloquial for *kovaṇam*], Kṛṣṇa lost his in the water. When everyone finished bathing he remained there, hesitating and feeling shame [*veṭkam*]. No one understood why he wouldn't come out. Meanwhile at a neighboring tank, Draupadī and her maids were also bathing. She observed the scene and understood. So she tore off a piece of her saree border [*muntāṇai*] and threw it to Kṛṣṇa from one pond to the other. Kṛṣṇa caught it and used it as his *kōmaṇam*. Then he came out of the water and told Draupadī: "In my life, I won't forget this kind of help. Out of gratitude, I will repay it in kind when the occasion comes."

Here it is not the ominous theme of blood that links Kṛṣṇa and Draupadī, but an amusing play on sexual modesty: Kṛṣṇa will make his loincloth from the portion of the saree that covers Draupadī's breasts. For the tiny piece of cloth that Draupadī throws to him, she will get in return the inexhaustible flood of sarees. Indeed, once again we are reminded of that sinuous weave of fabrics that begins the drama cycle with the theft of the sarees of the bathing Gopīs. How appropriate it is that Draupadī should be promised unending sarees for rescuing Kṛṣṇa from the same impasse in which he had left the Gopīs!

The drama concludes on a note that further links this play to the next. In the classical epic tradition, the ostensible completion of the Rājasūya is immediately followed by the humiliation of Duryodhana. The Pāṇḍavas' sabhā was built for them with numerous illusionistic intricacies by the demon (*asura*) Maya. Unlike Arjuna, who shoots the fish while looking at its reflection, Duryodhana is

than being just a bit of pan-Indian epic folklore, this northern story has a southern source: it draws on the apparently southern theme of Draupadī being Kṛṣṇa's sister. But the sibling theme is also found in the Potrāj-goddess cult of Maharashtra (Vetschera 1978, 123, 152).

unable to penetrate the surface appearances of the sabhā's pools and polished walls. So he makes a fool of himself, falling and bumping about, and is mocked. In the Sanskrit, as it is first narrated, the mockery comes from Bhīma, Arjuna, and the Pāṇḍavas' servants (2.43.6–7). But when Duryodhana returns home to tell his father, he remembers it as coming from Bhīma (whose taunts embitter him most), Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna, Draupadī and the women, and the twins (2.46.26–35). In the *Villipāratam*, it comes to be Draupadī's mockery that is repeatedly singled out (2.2.13, 215), and so it is in the dramas. "The Rājasūya Sacrifice" thus ends on this note: "Seeing this [Duryodhana's discomfiture], Pāñcālī clapped her hands and laughed" (*kaikoṭṭi pāñcālī kaṇṭu nakaitt' iṭavum*; *IY*, 64). Duryodhana will frequently recall Draupadī's mockery in subsequent dramas (e.g., Kuruṣṇappillai 1973, 17). But it is especially in "Dice Match and Disrobing" that he will recall her derision as a provocation to humiliate her in turn.

B. *Cūtu-Tukilurital*, "Dice Match and Disrobing"

Whether in performance or in print, this drama is a stunning piece of work.⁷ The most forceful of the influential *Mahābhārata* plays by Irāmaccantira Kavirāyar of Irāyanallūr, it combines the narrative, dramatic, and ritual elements that account for the transformation of Draupadī from one of a number of happy Pāṇḍava brides into a violated and vengeful South Indian festival goddess. Thus its place at the turning point of the Terukkūttu cycle. In its performance, the play's violent and inauspicious aspect may single it out for distinctive treatment. At Mēlaccēri, for this drama alone, when Draupadī's processional icon is brought on her "chariot" to face the stage after touring the village (see chap. 1), she—that is, her icon—is shielded from the disrobing by a yellow cloth screen placed in front of her. At Mañkaḷam in 1986, the hundred-and-two-year-old Ramalinga Goundar had a dream in which Draupadī cautioned

7. Irāmaccantira Kavirāyar [1857] 1977 (henceforth *CTU*); I also consulted the 1963 edition, which varies only slightly. On earlier editions, see chap. 7, sec. C. The Sanskritized title *Turōpatai Vastirāpahanam*, "Disrobing of Draupadī," is also used. I observed full festival performances by the Veṛri Viṇāyakar Nāṭakacapai of Pompūr village, Villupuram Taluk, South Arcot, at Tindivanam on 20 July 1981, and by the Pakkiripālaiyam troupe at Mēlaccēri on 18 June 1986. I also saw shortened versions by the latter on 15 January 1982 and 16 April 1982, and by the Nāṇavēl troupe of Tēvikāppuram (Polur Taluk, North Arcot) on 5 June 1986. See also Frasca 1984, 351–400, translating the opening scenes of the play from a performed version, clearly based on Irāmaccantira Kavirāyar, by a troupe from Peruṅkaṭṭūr, Cheyyar Taluk, North Arcot (but note on p. 365 that the drama is attributed to unnamed *pulavars*, or poets).

that the disrobing scene itself should be omitted from the play that year. Still more pointedly, in festivals where the play is not performed (see table 6), its omission may also be explained in a fashion that recognizes its power. At Cuddalore, the temple pūcāri indicated that "Dice Match and Disrobing" was removed from the cycle because inauspicious events—deaths, accidents, mishaps during the firewalk, unexpected troubles for the actors or temple trustees—had been found to result from its performance. One notes, however, that at Cuddalore this play was in effect replaced by another that also emphasizes inauspicious things, more particularly, possession: "Aravān's Sacrifice," performed there out of sequence where one would expect "Dice Match and Disrobing." Indeed, there are other cases where the omission of "Disrobing" seems to be compensated for by alternative dramas emphasizing possession, an indication that its possession-inducing scenes are most intrinsic to the structure of a Draupadī festival.⁸

There are, however, so many features of this play decisive to the movement of the festival that to single out possession alone would be misleading. Rather, as the third part of this chapter will show, possession is a nuclear element, with other important ritual and theological themes constellated around it. But before turning to this ensemble, I will begin with an account of the main action of the play. Except for a few significant differences and a radically altered ending, the story is familiar from the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*. Moreover, the differences are all traceable to the *Villipāratam*. As I noted in chapter 7, Irāmacantira Kavirāyar shows an exceptional fidelity in this play to Villi's basic structure and content.⁹ I will take his chapbook version as my main guide to the primary action, keeping in mind that it provides the skeleton that is fleshed out

8. At Maṇakuṭaiyaṇ not only "Aravān's Sacrifice" but the "Slaughter of Kīcaka" follow each other at this point, and at Kārappaṭṭu there is an out-of-sequence two-night performance of the latter play. The reason for the omission at Entiyūr, however, was that the segment of the Vaṇṇiyar community that had traditionally sponsored it had grown too poor to do so.

9. The parallelisms include sequence of events, order and content of speeches, citation of myths—each prefaces the dragging of Draupadī into the sabhā by Vidura's telling of the myth of the relief of the Burden of the Earth (Villi 2.2.202–204; CTU, 60)—and on down to proverbs and prominent symbols. For instance, when the Pāṇḍavas receive the invitation to the dice match, Villi has Dharma say, "It would be better to drink toddy" (2.2.66), while the play has Bhīma say, "It would be better to drink toddy with a dried fish" (CTU, 31), a low-caste combination. Similarly, in both sources Śakuni taunts Duryodhana by comparing him to a lion who retreats to a cave rather than attack the elephant outside (Villi 2.2.7; CTU, 10; and in oral performance, see Frasca 1984, 369). As the play is so close to Villi, I will cite parallels only when they are particularly close and revealing.

in live performance. For convenience sake, I break the action down into six dramatic segments that correspond roughly to the major scenes of the play. For the first, we are able to enrich our discussion by drawing on Frasca's marvelous translated sample of Terukkūttu in performance (1984, 351–400; see n. 7).

1. The Kauravas Hatch Plans for the Dice Match

Let us note at the outset that while the chapbook version of this segment transpires in sixteen pages (CTU, 9–25), the same dramatic action is not complete in forty-one pages before Frasca's recorded text breaks off. This gives an idea of the elasticity of a Terukkūttu chapbook text, not to mention the other elements—music, choreography, passing the hat—that expand upon it.

After opening songs, the Kaṭṭiyaṅkāraṇ introduces Duryodhana's court. Rankled by the events of the Pāṇḍavas' Rājasūya—his own embarrassment at falling down, the great wealth through tribute attained by the Pāṇḍavas, the new recognition of their paramountcy by other kings—Duryodhana holds council with his three most intimate advisors: Duḥśāsana (Turcātaṇaṇ), the second oldest and vilest of his ninety-nine brothers; Karṇa, his loyal friend ever since he appointed him king of Aṅga;¹⁰ and Śakuni (Cakuṇi), his maternal uncle, brother of the Kauravas' mother, Gāndhārī (Kāntārī). Duḥśāsana compares Duryodhana to the moon that has paled before the Pāṇḍavas' sun (cf. Villi 2.2.8), and he advises poison, treachery, or cunning to defeat them. Karṇa, vaunting his own prowess, advises heroic action. But Śakuni, reminding Karṇa how little his prowess gained for him at Draupadī's Svayaṃvara, says it would not be possible to defeat the Pāṇḍavas in battle even in seven births (CTU, 10–11; Frasca 1984, 371–76). They can only be defeated by treachery and cunning, for which he is himself renowned. Accordingly, he advises Duryodhana to build a maṇḍapa and invite the Pāṇḍavas to a game of dice, at which he will win everything from them.

The plan delights Duryodhana, who flatters Śakuni and then, recalling his humiliation at the Rājasūya, breaks into a most astonishing and ominous vituperation of Draupadī. In the verse of Irāmaccantira Kavirāyar, this all occurs in one song. At the Rājasūya, Duryodhana says, not only did the Pāṇḍavas ridicule me (*ēḷitam paṇṇi*) but "that *paṭṭi* [low person, whore] Draupadī looked at me often, shaking in mirth [*kuluṇka nakaittālē*], that bitch [*kuk-*

10. This episode would normally be covered in the Piracāṅkam amid the tales of the births and youths of the heroes (see table 3), and can thus be alluded to in the dramas.

karcirukki: lit., “dog-wench”) destroyed my pride [*vetkam*], that cheat [*nīli*] abused me” (CTU, 13). In the performance rendered by Frasca, however, Duryodhana’s song is introduced, after a song of praise to Draupadī, by a most revealing exchange between Śakuni and the Kaṭṭiyaṅkāraṇ. The latter announces: “We are now going to scold and revile this Ammaṇ whose true nature is fire and who is the ornamented wife of the five Pāṇḍavas.” And Śakuni by way of apology adds, “We are only doing it for our stomachs,” and allows that “Tiraupatiyammaṇ must accept both sin and holiness from us.” As soon as Duryodhana begins his revilement of the “whore” Draupadī who laughed at him, he becomes briefly possessed, and then he continues his vituperation, alternating the words of the song with dialogue, and continuing to rant while Śakuni defends him and the Kaṭṭiyaṅkāraṇ defends Draupadī (Frasca 1984, 382–85).

After this interlude, the maṇḍapa is built (a very humorous episode in Frasca 1984, 385–90; cf. CTU, 18–19), and the virtuous Vidura (Vituraṇ), the Kauravas’ junior paternal uncle (*cirraṇ*), is summoned for his consent to the trickery, which he refuses. Decrying the plan, he suggests that all Duryodhana needs to do is send a letter to the Pāṇḍavas from Dhṛtarāṣṭra (Tirutarāṣṭiraṇ), the Kauravas’ father, requesting their kingdom, and the Pāṇḍavas will willingly give it. To this Duryodhana replies metaphorically that the tree he has planted and watered—that is, Vidura, whom he supports—gives shade not only to him but to the Pāṇḍavas, whom he correctly suspects Vidura of favoring (CTU, 15; Frasca 1984, 394; cf. Villi 2.2.32–36).¹¹ Vidura leaves, unswayed, and the blind Dhṛtarāṣṭra is then brought in to approve the plan. Before he actually does so, Frasca’s translation of the performed version breaks off. But when Dhṛtarāṣṭra does agree, he is far more eager than in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*: “If you kill the Pāṇḍavas and rule the world, it will be like getting sight to my eye” (CTU, 23).¹² He then orders Vidura to go to the Pāṇḍavas with a letter of invitation to see the new maṇḍapa and advises his sons and others to keep their plan secret.

2. Vidura Goes to the Pāṇḍavas

The scene having shifted to Indraprastha, Vidura arrives at the Pāṇḍava court and is greeted with rites of hospitality: Dharma and Arjuna perform *pāda pūjā*, washing his feet. He praises the Pāṇ-

11. One notes that the order of the Vidura and maṇḍapa-building scenes are reversed from the chapbook to the performance translated by Frasca.

12. Similarly, see *Villipāratam* 2.2.49. He is still, however, a vascillating character in the play as a whole, as he is in Villi.

davas and Draupadī,¹³ but delivers his message in tones of grief. The letter, he says, is not just an invitation to see a maṇḍapa. Dharma intuitively discerns its hidden meaning, and decries the practice of dice for warriors, saying it is one of the five great sins. The four younger Pāṇḍavas urge Dharma to decline the invitation, but Dharma says that neither a father's word nor fate can be circumvented (CTU, 28–34; cf. Villi 2.65–67, 78)

3. Dhṛtarāṣṭra Receives the Pāṇḍavas

Welcoming the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī to Hāstinapura, Dhṛtarāṣṭra tells them to visit his wife, “your mother Gāndhārī,” as well as Bhīṣma, Droṇa, and others. In a brief meeting, Gāndhārī praises Draupadī, comparing her favorably to her other daughters-in-law (the wives of her own hundred sons) whom she likens to a “herd of buffaloes” (*erumaikalkūṭṭam*; CTU, 38). Then Duryodhana sends a servant to invite the Pāṇḍavas to see the maṇḍapa: more beautiful, he says, than the one built for the Rājāsūya (CTU, 35–40).

4. The Dice Match

With Draupadī now remaining offstage, supposedly in the women's quarters, Duryodhana shows off the maṇḍapa to the Pāṇḍavas, finally suggesting the game of dice. Dharma, Bhīma, and Arjuna speak out vociferously against it. But Śakuni and Karṇa egg them on, telling Dharma his “shivering” and “trembling” (*naṭuniki, vilavilattu*) expose him as a coward. Arjuna threatens to tear out Karṇa's tongue (cf. Villi 2.2.170: his “mouth”), but Dharma insists on calm and agrees to play, saying that dharma (*tarumam*) will triumph in the end and that “[only] a person of forbearance will rule the earth” (*poruttavar pūmiy ālvār*; CTU, 43).

The dicing is reduced to four rounds, with Śakuni cavorting at each victorious throw,¹⁴ Dharma sitting impassively amid mounting gloom, and others showing characteristic reactions. As elsewhere, the first stake is a “garland of pearls” (*muttu mālai*), presumably a symbol of sovereignty, which Dharma removes from around his neck and places on the ground for Śakuni to give to Duryodhana (CTU, 47; cf. Villi 2.2.175; *Mbh.* 2.53.22).¹⁵ The second bet telescopes

13. In the chapbook Draupadī appears here with her husbands (CTU, 29), but in the performed versions I observed, she is not introduced until the arrival at Hāstinapura.

14. In the Pakkiriṭṭaiyam troupe's 1986 Mēlaccēri performance, he carries a kind of “seeing imp” or “evil-eye imp” doll (his *tiṭṭicāttan*) to secure his winnings

15. Cf. the uses of pearls as a symbol in *Bhagavad Gītā* 7.7 and in *The Epic of Palnāḍu* (Roghair 1982, 322–26).

all the Pāṇḍavas' wealth, wagered over thirteen throws in the Sanskrit epic, into one toss. The third wager, lost in one throw rather than the five of the Sanskrit, is for the five Pāṇḍavas themselves, including Dharma, with the condition that the brothers now become Duryodhana's slaves (*aṭimai*). Upon losing this throw, the five stand in line before Duryodhana. Dharma then laboriously removes portions of his upper apparel: his epaulettes, outer shirt, and the cloth wound around his head to support his crown. And then each of the Pāṇḍavas relinquishes his most characteristic possession: Dharma his crown (*kirīṭa*), Bhīma his mace, Arjuna his bow, Nakula his horse, and the scholarly Sahadeva a *śāstra* ("book").¹⁶

The last stake is, of course, Draupadī herself. This time it is not Śakuni who sets the stakes, but Duryodhana, a departure from both the Sanskrit and Tamil epics, which attribute this final wager to Śakuni. Duryodhana's own desire for Draupadī, soon cited by Śakuni as the reason for this bet (CTU, 57), is thus exposed, along with his determination to humiliate her. Vidura steps forth to protest: the elder brother's wife is equal to the mother (CTU, 53).¹⁷ But his words are ridiculed. The throw is made and Draupadī is lost. Duryodhana crows: "Is it the sin of the impoverished Dharma-putra? Is it the fault of his younger brothers? Is it the wickedness [*tīṅku*] of the green garlanded Draupadī who laughed and smiled at me, mincing affectedly? Is it the merit of my agreeable maternal uncle Śakuni? Or is it the pūjās I have performed? Whatever the reason, the Pāṇḍavas have come here and lost all" (CTU, 57–58; cf. Villi 2.2.195). Bhīṣma then warns: "Pāñcālī has the quality of nectar [*amirtakuṇa pāñcālī*]; she is not a small thing. If she curses you, it will not leave you unaffected" (CTU, 58). But Duryodhana chides him, orders the takeover of the Pāṇḍavas' country, demands straw and beggars' pots for his newly won "bonded slaves" (*kot-taṭimai*), and—ignoring more protests from Vidura—sends his servant Piratikāmi (Sanskrit *pratikāmin*, "usher") to bring Draupadī from the women's quarters. Piratikāmi returns with Draupadī's famous question: did Dharma bet her before or after himself? Only when this is clarified will she come forth. Furiously, Duryodhana orders Duḥśāsana to drag the "wanton woman" (*vampi*) in by the hair (CTU, 59–62).

16. Alternatively, this relinquishing of the possessions may occur after the wager and loss of Draupadī, as in the Pakkiriṇpālaiyam troupe's 1986 Mēlaccēri performance.

17. Cf. Villi 2.2.183–85. In the Sanskrit, Vidura is silent at this point, protesting earlier during the gambling for possessions.

5. Hair-Pulling, Disrobing, and Vows of Revenge

We are now at the heart of the play: twenty-eight pages of text that can be spun out over roughly three hours of violent and profoundly disturbing drama, carrying one from the depths of night to the break of dawn. Although Irāmaccantira Kavirāyar's play includes a sequel episode, the performed versions I saw all concluded with these climactic scenes. As it is primarily this segment that we will explore in our next section, I will confine myself to the minimal summary.

As Duḥśāsana begins to fume on the central stage, the curtain-lifting for Draupadī is left incomplete, revealing her behind the barrier of the rolled up length of curtain, standing before the musicians' bench in what is supposed to be the women's quarters of the palace, and separated from Duḥśāsana only by the strip of cloth. Though there is no mention that she is menstruating, the fact is said to be known by actors and audience alike, and the actor portraying Draupadī may represent this by wearing "her" hair loose throughout the scene or by loosening it at the point when she is about to be dragged into the gambling hall.¹⁸ The curtain as a railing is scant protection (see plate 9). When Duḥśāsana, hurling insults, lunges for her and touches her hand, she runs toward her "mother-in-law" Gāndhārī (*māmi*, actually Duryodhana and Duḥśāsana's mother) to seek asylum. But Gāndhārī, cruel and sarcastic, spurns her.¹⁹ No longer protected, flushed into the open, Draupadī and Duḥśāsana circle each other, insults flying.

Then, according to the text, he seizes her by the hair (CTU, 67), though actually he swings her by a stick or a length of wound cloth that they each hold at opposite ends (see plate 10). The Duḥśāsana actor may pause at this point to perform *dīpārāadhanā* (the devotional display of a camphor flame) for the goddess, explaining to the audience that he—the actor—must now assault Draupadī as a professional duty, but that as her devotee he begs her forgiveness. According to Subramanyam (1979, 15–16), the Duḥśāsana actor will not dare to touch Draupadī and may faint at the thought before

18. Information from R. S. Mayakrishnan; cf. Frasca 1984, 258 n. 11: Draupadī's period is something that "the Terukkūttu presentation of this episode does not deal with at all." It would seem rather that it does not openly announce it. A note of confusion may derive from Villi 2.2.219–20, which mentions that her hair, which collapses at this point, was adorned with garlands and surrounded by bees. A menstruating woman would not have flowers in her hair. But it is not certain whether her hair is garlanded at the very point that it becomes dishevelled, or is only normally worn with flowers.

19. As she does in Villi 2.2.218. In the Sanskrit epic, she is more sympathetic to Draupadī and critical of Duryodhana, but without a role in the hair-pulling or disrobing.

even touching the stick, for fear of “wounding” her.²⁰ But we should also not forget that Draupadī’s recognized but unmentioned menstrual pollution can also be transmitted to Duḥśāsana. Each can defile the other, both verbally and physically.

With mounting violence, Duḥśāsana now swings Draupadī about in circles, dashes her to the ground so that she rolls over and over, her hair swirling in the dust (cf. Villi 2.2.220: her hair falls to the ground). Draupadī laments painfully. They exchange insults. Several times this cycle is repeated, until finally he drags her before the court. Here, in the chapbook version, Draupadī appeals to the elders, who remain silent, and berates her husbands for their passivity. But in performance (at Tindivanam) her main appeal—another futile one—is to the scathing Gāndhārī (see plate 11). Finally, one voice rises to defend her, that of the youngest Kaurava, Vikarṇa (Vikarṇan), normally played by a youthful actor. He supports Draupadī’s right to have her question answered, and decries her mistreatment. Vidura praises the boy, but Śakuni and Karṇa denounce him. Irrked beyond measure, Duryodhana then orders the ultimate insult. In the chapbook, Irāmaccantira Kavirāyar follows Villi 2.2.244–46 and has Duryodhana first give Duḥśāsana the command to remove the Pāṇḍavas’ garments (*vastiram*), as well as Draupadī’s saree, so as to break her pride (CTU, 80).²¹ The Pāṇḍavas remove their own upper garments, and Draupadī laments the loss of their royal dignity. When Vidura protests the commanded disrobing of Draupadī, Duryodhana’s rage only grows hotter. He repeats the command, and the stage is then cleared for the disrobing scene and the miracle of the sarees.

In the festival context, dawn is now breaking. Draupadī stands on the musicians’ platform. Once again the half curtain is held before her, the fragile screen between her and the fuming

20. Biardeau (CR 88, 180) has interpreted the hair-pulling in the Sanskrit epic as a gesture evocative of a sacrifice, one in which Draupadī—a “victim” form of the goddess like Sati or Reṇukā—would be the offering herself. On this theme, see further Hildebeitel, in press.

21. Cf. *Mbh.* 2.61.39. The stripping of the Pāṇḍavas’ upper garments (*uttariyas* in both Villi and the Sanskrit epic) is interpreted by Raghavan, citing analogies in the story of Nala and Damayantī, as a “customary disgrace” within the ritual format of the dice match. Furthermore, he argues, the disrobing of Draupadī is “not a special insult” offered to her, but “part and parcel” of the same scenario of ritual stripping (see Bhatta 1985, 97–98, citing Raghavan’s contribution to the Twenty-First All India Oriental Conference at Srinagar, 1961, 14, 16). In further connection with the Nala-Damayantī story, cf. Biardeau 1984, 252–55, 258; 1985, 10, 19. Raghavan’s argument suggests the possibility of another unexpected deepening of the complementarities of the two halves of the *Sabhā Parvan*. Also, in the Sanskrit epic the double stripping command is made, not by Duryodhana, but by Karṇa, a matter of some symbolic significance (see Hildebeitel 1980b).

Duḥśāsana. More insults, more protestations. At last he reaches beneath the screen to pull at the bottom of her saree, and she lifts her hands in prayer to Kṛṣṇa, crying, "Govinda! Govinda!" When Duḥśāsana removes the first saree, it is tied to another, and so on and so on, while she continues her supplication. High over the stage, against the brightening sky, perhaps, as at Tindivanam, with the branches of a massive peepul tree spreading behind him, peacock crowned and flute in hand, is Kṛṣṇa, holding the end of a yellow saree that drapes down over Draupadī's shoulder. It represents the source of all the other sarees, and according to my two main dramatist informants, it should be yellow (*mañcal*) to denote Draupadī's chastity (*karpū*).²² Duḥśāsana keeps pulling the linked sarees from between Draupadī's feet and under the curtain until they litter the entire stageground with a burst of brilliant and varied colors. Duḥśāsana is astonished, horrified. He attempts to measure the sarees' length, flings and kicks them about, hurls more insults. Finally possessed and totally exhausted, he collapses (see plates 12 and 13).

In the performances I have seen, the action closes at this point of vindication and peak intensity. But my two dramatist informants tell me that the drama should include the remaining scenes that Irāmaccantira Kavirāyar includes in this segment. Accordingly, the elders of the Kaurava court now proclaim Draupadī's chastity. But Duryodhana, refusing to give up, tells Duḥśāsana to bring Draupadī over and place her on his thigh. Or better, she should come spontaneously, "suddenly" (*titir enru*; CTU, 87) on her own. He thus invites her to follow the humorous Terukkūttu convention in which amorous wives run and jump into their husbands' laps. It is the last straw.

Vikarṇa warns and denounces Duryodhana once again. And Draupadī launches into the grim exchange with Duryodhana in which she predicts that "vultures will peck your thigh so that it will become a filthy place producing wriggling worms [*neliyap puluputtu*]" ; vows, "I will not take up and bind with my hand my rolling wavy hair which has fallen on the earth unless you and all your relatives are destroyed on the very cruel battlefield [*mikkak*

22. I note the following variations. In the sponsored, shortened performances of the Pakkiriṭālaiyam troupe, Kṛṣṇa stood behind the musicians, elevated only by their platform, and held a golden-colored saree. Subramanyam (1979, 16) indicates that the villagers contribute the sarees, but my chief informants knew no such practice. At Tindivanam, however, the whole drama (though not the sarees) was appropriately paid for by the local Vaṇṇāṇ (washerman) community. Subramanyam also mentioned a alternate manner of representing the disrobing, the Draupadī actor creating the "illusion even with two or three sarees" by "a deft whirling . . . clockwise and counter-clockwise" (ibid.). The Nāṇavēl troupe performs it this way.

koṭiyap paṭukaḷattil”; and concludes: “Listen, you kings in the sabhā! If in the future, on the battlefield [*iraṇakkaḷattil*], I do not tie up my hair standing on the chest of the man who has done this disgrace of touching my hair and sarees [*kūntalaiyum tukilaiyun tīṇṭi*], having made me stand in this royal sabhā, then I am not Draupadī” (CTU, 88). Let us note that Irāmaccantira Kavirāyar does incorporate certain echoes of Draupadī cult ritual in these predictions and vows, most notably the reference to the *paṭukaḷam* as both battlefield and ritual ground and the precise matter of Draupadī standing on Duryodhana’s chest (see chap. 18, sec. B). But he does not have Draupadī vow to dress her hair with the blood from Duryodhana’s thigh. Here his Draupadī follows the apparent reticence of Villi’s:

He who brought me without fearing into the court of kings, touching my saree, touching my hair [*tukil tīṇṭi aḷakam tīṇṭi*] which was made fragrant, its garland surrounded by swarms of bees, and who spoke out publically in an indecent way in the presence of kings—not until the victory drums roll on the battlefield, having cut off [their] crowned heads, smelling of raw meat, the hot blood falling, will I take up and bind my dishevelled hair. (2.2.255)

The dressing of her hair with Duryodhana’s blood is, however, part of Draupadī’s vow in full-scale performances (at least by the Pakkiriṭṭaiyām troupe) and has thematic momentum throughout both the dramatic and ritual components of the festival. We shall meet a version of this vow in chapter 13 that carries even stronger ritual resonances.

Finally—though I have not seen this in performance—the Pāṇḍavas follow Draupadī’s vow with their own vows to kill their particular Kaurava opponents. Bhīma vows he will only drink water beaten into spray by his mace until he slakes his thirst with the blood of Duḥśāsana. Arjuna vows to kill Karṇa, making his fallen body jump from its wounds. And Nakula and Sahadeva swear to kill Cavupalanātaṇ (probably Śakuni’s son Ulūka) and Śakuni respectively (CTU, 89–90).

6. The Return Dice Match

The rest of Irāmaccantira Kavirāyar’s drama does not seem to be performed at all. In following Villi, however, it is not without interest with regard to the full presentation of the Draupadī cult’s *Mahābhārata*.

Briefly, Dhṛtarāṣṭra realizes the desperate turn things have taken, praises Draupadī, and then feebly attempts to set matters right by asking her to excuse his sons’ behavior as that of “madmen” (*pic-*

carkaḷ), brothers-in-law (*maccinaṇ*) who acted "somewhat improperly" (*ētō vacai*) in a game that got out of hand (CTU, 91; much as in Villi 2.2.261). He offers Draupadī whatever she wants, and, as elsewhere, she accepts the two boons of her husbands' release from slavery and the return of their weapons. Further, he gives the Pāṇḍavas all that they have gambled away and permits them to go home.

From here on, however, the play follows precedents in Villi that differ markedly from what is found in the Sanskrit epic. Instead of Duryodhana and his cronies plotting to get the Pāṇḍavas back for the winner-take-all throw that will send the loser to thirteen years of exile, Duryodhana urges Duḥśāsana to stop the Pāṇḍavas' departure. Duḥśāsana tells the brothers that Dhṛtarāṣṭra's word is faulty and that Dharma would act unjustly were he to take back what he has just lost. When they return, Duryodhana insultingly says Dharma should act in a kingly manner and go to the forest (cf. Villi 2.2.269, where it is part of Duḥśāsana's connivance). Even Droṇa agrees that such is the righteous way of kings, and Bhīṣma and Vidura cite as precedent the humiliations and exiles of Harisćandra and Nala. Finally, Droṇa sets the terms: go to the forest for twelve years; then spend one year incognito and come back and rule your country.

The thirteen-year exile is thus not a matter of another dice throw, as it is in the Sanskrit epic, but a dharmic agreement on all sides. But there still is one additional stake. Draupadī, surprisingly pleased with the terms of exile, insists now on this final throw herself: not for the stake of forest exile, but for the full release of her husbands from slavery so that when they do return they can justly rule. One is reminded of Pārvatī's penchant for dice, which she enjoys in many myths with her husband Śiva. Indeed, in some cases they gamble for the removal of each other's clothes (see O'Flaherty 1973, 204, 247; Hildebeitel 1987b, 473). Here Draupadī only insists on the game and does not play it herself. But in a Telugu variant she does her own gambling, playing behind a screen and moving the dice with her toes. She opposes Duryodhana directly, rather than Śakuni, and wins back her husbands' kingdom (rather than their freedom from slavery), which they then refuse to accept, preferring to win it back justly in battle and on their own (Rama Raju 1982). In our drama, as in Villi, Draupadī turns the betting over to Dharma. His stake—all he has left—is his merit (*puṇṇiyam*; CTU, 98; Villi 2.2.280). This time he wins, because at Draupadī's behest he prays to Kṛṣṇa. At this turn of fortunes, the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī go off triumphantly, with the blessings of the Kuru elders, to the forest.



. Four icons in the Melaccēri Draupadī temple inner sanctum: Kuntī, Draupadī, Subhadrā, and Viṣṇu-Durgā (Durgā as the elder sister of Kṛṣṇa, who foretells the death of Kāṁsa).



2. The Mēlaccēri Draupadi temple from the Kōvil maṇḍapa, looking into the inner sanctum through the Pōtta Rāja maṇḍapa, both “built by Cunitaṇ.” The stone slabs with images of Muttāl Rāvuttaṇ and Pōttu Rāju show in the central entrance. Photo by Helen Hildebeitel.



3. Halebid, Hoysaleswara Temple: Arjuna at Draupadi's Svayamvara winning the bride by shooting upward at a fish while looking down at its reflection in a pot of water or oil. Photo by Helen Hildebeitel.



4. Halebid, Hoysaleswara Temple: Draupadi about to wash her hair with the blood of Duhsāsana, offered to her by Bhima. The woman to Draupadi's left may be Hidimbā, who dances with Bhima after he drinks Duhsāsana's blood in the tenth-century Kannada *Bhāratam* of Pampa (see Sitaramiah 1967, 126). Photo by Helen Hildebeitel.



5. The pāratiyār V. M. Brameesa Mudaliyar, with a volume of Nallāppillai's *Makāpāratam* before him and his accompanist R. S. Govindaswami playing the cirutippeṭṭi beside him. Tindivanam, July 1981.



6. Draupadī (R. S. Mayakrishnan) as Vīrapāñcālī standing on *Acalammācuraṇ* and removing his heads in the improvised drama *Acalammācuraṇ Caṇṭai*. Cinnapāpucamuttiram, April 1982. Photo by Guy Welbon.



7. Wooden processional icon of Draupadī, with parrot on closed lotus bud in her right hand and loosened hair. Tindivanam.



8. Muttāl Rāvuttan with dogs, tiger, and liquor-plying attendants. Pondicherry.



9. Duḥśāsana stalks Draupadī behind the barrier of the rolled-up stage curtain, each holding an end of the stick that separates them. Smoke from the offering of incense fills the air. Pompūr troupe, Tindivanam, July 1981.



10. Duḥśāsana swings Draupadī but never touches her; each holds the stick. Pompūr troupe, Tindivanam, July 1981.



11. Thrown to the ground, Draupadī seeks help unavailingly from Gāndhārī. Pakkiriṭṭalaiyam troupe, Pakkiriṭṭalaiyam, April 1982.



12. Draupadī calling on Kōvintā. Pakkiriṭṭalaiyam troupe, Pakkiriṭṭalaiyam, April 1982. Photo by Guy Welbon.



13. While Duḥśāsana pulls sarees from beneath the curtain, a single yellow (*mañcaḷ*) saree defines the flow of Kṛṣṇa's graceful response to Draupadī's prayers. Pompūr troupe, Tindivanam, July 1981.



14. Arjuna (R. S. Mayakrishnan) as the half male, half female Bṛhannaḍā in "The Slaughter of Kicaka." Pakkiriṭṭaiyam troupe, Tindivanam, August 1977.



15. Heads of Aravāṇ on southeast corner of Cantirampāṭi Draupadī temple.



16. Fresco in ardhamandapa of Sowcarpet (Madras) Draupadī temple showing an interpretation of "Aravāṇ's Kaḷappali" in which Aravāṇ offers his head to Kālī.



17. Wooden processional icon of Pöttu Rāja, head in hand. Tindivanam.



18. Fixed stone icon of Pöttu Rāja, head in hand and with matted hair (*jaṭai*), facing into the Pakkiripālaiyam Draupadī temple.



19. Wooden processional icon of Pöttu Rāja dangling a lion. Tiruvilaiyātal Street Temple, Tiruvannamalai.



20. Bhīma as the wood hauler Virakaṇ destroys the wall of Pōrmannaṇ's fort. Pakkiripālaiyam troupe, Cinnāpāpucamuttiram, April 1982.



21. Kṛṣṇa (R. S. Natarajan) and Arjuna-Vijayāmpāl (R. S. Mayakrishnan) about to set off for Pōrmannaṇ's fort. Pakkiripālaiyam troupe, Cinnāpāpucamuttiram, April 1982.

22. Kṛṣṇa as a hundred-year-old "grandmother," here with the Kaṭṭiyaṅkāraṇ, accompanying Arjuna-Vijayāmpāl to Śivānandapuri. Pakkiriṭṭaiyam troupe, Cinnapāpucamuttiram, April 1982.



23. Vijayāmpāl and Kṛṣṇa, the aged "grandmother," make off with Pōrmaṇṇa's pūjā items. Pōrmaṇṇa implores their early return. Pakkiriṭṭaiyam troupe, Cinnapāpucamuttiram, April 1982.



24. Pormannan, carrying his father's head, comes to marry Vijayampal. Pakkripalaiyam troupe, Cinnapapucamuttiram, April 1982.



25. A huge mound of rice and curries is amassed before a giant figure of Pöttu Rāja on a chariot, drawn by two lions, on the night before the chariot's procession through the village. Pötturājācāmi festival, Mañkaḷam village, March 1982.



6. Pöttu Rāja with horns, on side of stone slab facing into Mānāmpāṭi Draupadī temple. A trivalingam is over his head, and here he carries a head in his right hand. A less distinct horned figure also shows on the out-facing side of the same slab.



27. Ceiling fresco of Sowcarpet (Madras) Draupadi temple ardhamandapa: Pöttu Rāja simultaneously leads the Pāṇḍavas (on left) into battle and the bearers of the karakam pot and the Virakuntam (on right) as if toward the firepit.



28. "Śrī Draupadī Amman's Birth from Fire." The inscription calls upon her to remove difficulties. Born with her are her whip, bell, bow and arrow, and parrot. Dharmarāja Temple, Dharmarāja Street, Bangalore.



9. Kṛṣṇa points Bhīma and Duryodhana toward the Tindivanam Draupadī temple, to which they repair for final worship of the goddess before the killing scene. Pakkiriṭṭaiyam troupe, Tindivanam, August 1977.



30. Śakuni, reborn as a "fox," devours Duryodhana's intestines. Cinnakaram troupe, Melaccēri, May 1982.



31. Āsvatthāman, thinking he is bringing the heads of the five Pāṇḍavas, shows the fallen Duryodhana the severed head of the son of Bhīma. Duryodhana rises to voice his sad recognition that the heads are those of his nephews. Pakkiripālaiyam troupe, Tindivanam, August 1977.



2. Draupadi steps on the fallen Duryodhana's thigh while Kṛṣṇa prepares to retie her hair.
akkiripālaiyam troupe, Tindivanam, August 1977.



33. Kṛṣṇa garlands Draupadī atop fallen Duryodhana, and the audience rises in sympathy. Pakkiri-pālaiyam troupe, Tindivanam, August 1977.



34. Possessed after retying her hair, Draupadī is cooled by a tray of turmeric powder placed on top of her head. Cinnakaram troupe, Melaccēri, May 1982.

C. Revilement, Possession, Devotion: The Drama and the Cult

The main action of "Dice Match and Disrobing" thus remains remarkably faithful to the *Villipāratam*, nor does it veer greatly from the Sanskrit epic, except in an ending that is not normally performed. Yet it would be a mistake to dwell only on its classical affinities. Its main importance lies in its close connection with the Draupadī cult, which must have inspired its author, and which it continues to serve.

First, however, let us note that many of the themes and images by which the play intensifies its relation to the cult would seem to have been anticipated in the *Villipāratam*. Although the phrase "parrot-word" is an "utterly conventional" way to describe women (a note of caution, for which I thank David Shulman), Villi may draw upon the cult in his selection of a parrot image for Draupadī at the disrobing scene. Duryodhana orders Duḥśāsana to "strip the parrot-word lady" (*kīlī molīyinaiyun tukiluriti*; Villi 2.2.244; cf. also 4.3.69). The green parrot, perched on Draupadī's right hand, is a recognized feature of her iconography (see plate 7).²³ Regardless of Villi's usage, however, in the play—which would seem to pick up on Villi here—the cultic associations of the parrot are decisive. Describing the scene of the littered sarees, the Kaṭṭiyaṅkāraṇ says: "Duḥśāsana stands, his hands weary from peeling off one by one the growing inexhaustible saree[s] of the forest parrot Draupadī" (*vaṇakkīlī turōpataikku mālāmal vaḷarnta cēlai*; CTU, 86). "Forest parrot" (*vaṇakkīlī*) is an epithet of Draupadī, as in this refrain of a devotional song about her called "Turōpataiyammaṇ Viruttam" in *Irupatu Cillavaik Kaṭṭaṭam* (n.d., 123–30): "Forest parrot, rich in jewels [?], scented with *kuṅkum*, O moon-shaped Pāñcālī" (*vaṇakkīlī katampamaṇi kuṅkum vacantanerī matirūpa pāñcāliyē*). Informants give different explanations for Draupadī's parrot and her relation to it. The general view is that the forest parrot flies free, and is more beautiful than one in a cage. According to the Tiruvannamalai Tiruvilaiyāṭal Street Temple pūcāri, the one that perches on her hand brought her flowers when she performed her forest tapas.

23. As it is also of many other South Indian goddesses, and not only Mīnākṣī (see Oppert 1893, 464, 472–74, 484; Shastri [1916] 1974, 199, 202, 220, 267; Ziegenbalg 1869, 142–43). On Draupadī and the parrot, see chap. 1 (conclusion to the Tindivanam pūcāri's song) and chap. 5, sec. B (the Terukkūttu version of the Cūṇitaṇ myth). Note also that a Telugu idiom among Gadabas equates death with a parrot leaving the nest, the parrot thus symbolizing "that which makes us alive" (Eisenhauer 1985, 49–50).

The sculptor Dandapani describes the parrot as a forest demon, while the improvised drama "Acalammācuran's Fight" makes it the wife of such a demon, whom Draupadī has conquered. I might further add that like Draupadī, the parrot shows its true nature in the forest. Also, in classical myth and iconography its green color links it with Agni, god of fire, an association that no doubt helps to explain the parrot's connection with so many fiery South Indian goddesses, particularly in their heated states.²⁴ In short, it would seem to be Draupadī's metonym: a symbol of beautiful, graceful, vital, wild, demonic, fiery, and destructive power.

Another important cultic theme intensified in the play, but more clearly foreshadowed if not already echoed in Villi, is the recognition of Draupadī as a "family" or "lineage deity" (*kulateyvam*). In Villi, when the disrobing scene ends and Draupadī stands vindicated, it is a moment of revelation, even a theophany. Bhīṣma and the kings close their hands and praise her as "the goddess of chastity and of the dynasty [or ancestral line]" (*karṇinukku' mara-pinukkun teyvam*; 2.2.250). The drama only brings out the rich theological implications of this scene. According to the "general voice," the Kuru elders (*periyōr*) at this same moment rise up and speak these "softened words":

To the five she is the goddess [or wife], to others she is the mother [*ivaḷē aivarukku tēvi ivaḷē marr' evarkku' mātā*].

She is the goddess Earth [*pūmitēvi*], she is Fire's self-manifestation [*akkinicorūpi*].

She is a speaker of truth, she is a woman of virtuous qualities.

She is the goddess of this lineage [*ivaḷē ikkulalatteyvam*]. Is there any other like her?

(CTU, 86)

To the Pāṇḍavas she is thus goddess-and-wife (*devī*), whereas to others—not only her sons but the elders themselves and by implication the rest of the world—she is revealed as the universal mother, identified with the elements earth and fire. But it is her identification as a *Kulateyvam* that closes this song of praise and

24. See O'Flaherty 1973, 96, 106; Shastri [1916] 1974, 243, and Bedekar 1965, 94–95, on the figure of Śuka ("Parrot"). According to the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*, Śuka was conceived when his father, Vyāsa, churning firesticks with the desirous thought of having a son, saw the Apsaras Ghṛtācī, frightened her into taking the form of a female parrot to flee his lust, and then shed his potent seed onto his firesticks instead. See especially Whitehead 1921, 131ff., on the parrot as a destructive form taken by the goddess Ammavaru, linked to fevers.

unites these other attributes into a single image. This is clear when we juxtapose this passage, which closes the disrobing scene, with one that anticipates it: Draupadī's long excoriation of the Kuru elders at the end of the hair-pulling scene. I cite her closing words to Dhṛtarāṣṭra:

O king of the Kuru dynasty who sees to the greatness of the
kula,

Do you allow this cruelty in your kula, O father-in-law?

If you permit these faults in the presence of the elders, my
father-in-law,

Will the rain fall? Will the world survive [*maḷai peyummō*
vaiyakam uyyumō]?

(CTU, 73)

Universal mother, manifest in earth and fire, Draupadī's mistreatment within the kula can cause failure of rains, even the end of the world. And it is the very elders whom she denounces after the hair-pulling who finally recognize her, after the disrobing, as the chaste and inviolable family deity. Plainly, the play builds upon the analogy between Draupadī's recognition, traceable perhaps to Villi but no earlier, as Kulateyvam of the Kuru lineage (and dynasty), and her worship as a Kulateyvam by certain lineages of the castes who so honor her, most notably among Vaṇṇiyars with their self-image as Kṣatriyas.

In fact, it is worth shifting our perspective for now to regard "Dice Match and Disrobing" not only as a dramatization of the *Mahābhārata*, but a play about the goddess in her *Mahābhārata* manifestation. As Beck has observed, it is particularly in myths that portray the goddess's "descending forms," "her time on earth" (1981, 101), that we find her repeatedly undergoing sufferings like those in this drama. Indeed, the recurrent imagery of the goddess's sufferings—her marital humiliations, sexual violations, and encounters with defilement and impurity—find countless variations in the myths of village, caste, and lineage goddesses and point to some of the most fundamental and determinative themes of their cults. I cite only the closest example, from Meyer's study of the cult of Aṅkāḷamman (1984, 50–54). Kulateyvam of numerous castes, but especially of the Cempaṭavar of South Arcot, Aṅkāḷamman's "descent" to the village of Mēl Malaiyaṇūr in Gingee Taluk parallels that of Draupadī to nearby Mēlaccēri and involves her in similar myths, which I will discuss in later chapters.

Moreover, the differences between village, caste, and lineage goddesses are not absolute. As just noted, myths of caste and

lineage goddesses like Draupadī and Ankālammaṇ can concern villages and territories, and those of village goddesses invariably portray intercaste tensions and family discord.²⁵ Thus what Brubaker has observed for village goddesses holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for caste and lineage goddesses as well. The goddess's sufferings are also those of her worshippers. When diseases or calamities afflict a village or a descent group, they are not just retaliation for the goddess's neglect or mistreatment, but manifestations of her own suffering. As in the typical case of her connections with small-pox, the goddess causes the disease, is the disease, shares the disease, and cures the disease (Brubaker 1978, 308–23; 1979, 130; cf. Beck 1981, 131).

Now for such a goddess revilement is no less fitting than praise. Indeed, in the ritual context, abuse may be said to please her (Elliot 1860a, 2: 680). Or it may find brief inclusion in a song of praise, as in the dramatists' invocation of Draupadī as "the lady who resides in Gingee": "Having said I live by you, O mother of my house, we scold you . . ." (in chap. 1, see verse 15). From what I have found in the rather limited literature on the widespread theme of ritual abuse of the goddess, two points are most immediately telling.²⁶

First, in the well-documented cases of ritual revilement in certain village goddess cults in Karnataka, it is striking that the abuse is an intrafamily affair. The chief reviling is done by an outcaste ritual actor, the Raniga or Rānigyā, who impersonates the mythical surviving younger brother of the goddess's former husband, himself an outcaste whom the goddess, a Brāhmaṇī, kills for his treachery of pretending to be a Brahman and deceiving her into marrying him. As elsewhere, I will refer to this story as the "outraged Brāhmaṇī" myth. At the myth's conclusion, the widowed Brāhmaṇī burns herself alive to purify herself and is transformed into the village goddess, having first cursed her slain husband to become her annual buffalo victim. Meanwhile, the husband-buffalo's younger brother is transformed into the Rānigyā whose revilements please the goddess at her festivals.²⁷ One can readily perceive the

25. As in the myths of Reṇukā-Māriyamman and the "outraged Brāhmaṇī," on the latter of which see below, n. 27 and chap. 13, n. 31.

26. Shulman (1985, 260 n. 109) mentions ritual abuse as "an important feature at festivals such as the Bharanī celebration to Bhagavati at Koṭunkolūr (Cranganore)" in Kerala; cf. Vaidyanathan 1982, 127–29. The ritual practice has echoes in Sanskrit (see O'Flaherty 1973, 218) and in ancient Near Eastern (see Hildebeitel 1980a, 216–17) myths.

27. See Elliot 1860a, 1: 429–40; 2: 680; Artal 1907, 634–41; Jayakar 1980, 26–28; Hildebeitel 1982b, 88–91; 1985c, 178–79; Ramanujan 1986, 57–62.

structural parallels: between Draupadī and the Brāhmaṇī as the violated and abused goddess; between Duryodhana and the outcaste older brother as the violating husband (or would-be husband) who causes the goddess her defilement; and between Duḥśāsana and the Rānigyā as the junior brother-in-law revilers. Throughout the drama, both Duryodhana and the Pāṇḍavas call Duḥśāsana *tampi*, or “younger brother,” stressing both his inferiority and his classificatory status as a “husband’s younger brother” to Draupadī. Second, the ritual abuse of the goddess is, at least in this Karnataka cult, an occasion for possession. Let us look further into how these and related matters are handled in our drama.

Quite clearly, in the Draupadī cult the revilement of the goddess is acted out, not as ritual by local officiants, but as drama through the itinerant Terukkūttu. The main actors are not defined by specific caste roles within a village, but as members of one family that comes to understand that Draupadī is its Kulateyvam. Still, there can be little doubt that “Dice Match and Disrobing” presents a revilement ritual. To be sure, once again the drama has classical epic precedents for its terms of revilement. In the *Villipāratam*, Duḥśāsana tells Draupadī she is a “good actress [*naṭikkun cevvi*], daily embracing five men” (2.2.216), and he and Duryodhana call her a “common girl” or “prostitute” (*potumakal*; 2.2.195; 232). The Sanskrit epic provides more of the same, slandering her polyandry, calling her a whore, and inviting her to share her evidently liberal favors with the Kurus (2.60.20, 27; 2.61.35). But the drama’s ritual character stands out clearly in contrast. The Sanskrit text, for instance, actually attenuates Duḥśāsana’s vituperation by ending it with a summary: “Meanwhile Duḥśāsana said many words that were bitter and mean” (2.60.46). The drama gives him full scope. Furthermore, as we have seen, the ritual abuse is doubled in the drama. A prefatory reviling, with possession, is uttered by Duryodhana. In effect, it provides a rehearsal, and also a means of emphasizing that the violation is essentially a double one, by both of the Kaurava brothers, which will eventually require a double vindication and revenge. But the main revilement of Draupadī remains clearly that of Duḥśāsana: delivered in her presence and combined with the physical defilement of her hair and sarees.

Going well beyond Duryodhana’s revilement, Duḥśāsana repeatedly calls Draupadī a “cheat” (*nīli*) and a “deceptive woman” (*māricakkallī*), and spews out a string of words for “whore” (*tēva-ṭiyaḷ*, *potumakal*, *paṭṭi*, *vēci*). Thus, “You wiggle like a harlot” (*vēcikaḷ pōlē kulukkirāy*; CTU, 70). In the performed version translated by Frasca, Duryodhana’s revilement includes a slur on Draupadī’s

polyandry: "That whore Tiraupataiyamman cavorts daily with those five Pāṇtavas shamelessly touching them all over" (1984, 383). But Duḥśāsana repeatedly amplifies such abuse, underscoring the promiscuous connotations of Draupadī's Svayaṃvara:

Long ago, at the drawing of the bow, did you not come before the sabhā of crowned kings? Uselessly you pretend. Get up and come. . . . You were just a prostitute [*tēvaṭiyāl*] there, wriggling, wiggling, glittering [*muṛukki kulukki minukkiṇa*] so that all the kings who had come could see you without blinking their open eyes. (CTU, 69)

One suspects that the allusions to the unblinking royal eyes and to Draupadī wriggling, wiggling, and glittering before them refer not only to Draupadī but to the suspended fish that represents her at her Svayaṃvara (the term *minukki* ["glittering, showy, attractive"] comes from the root *min/minnu* [Burrow and Emeneau 1961, 326, root 3994], which resonates with *min*, "fish" [ibid, 327, root 3999]). How, Duḥśāsana seems to ask, could someone who tempted all the kings like a dangling fish now pretend to modesty in front of her own relatives?

Now it is only your *māmaṇs* and *maittuṇaṇs*.²⁸ Uselessly you look for objections to coming. Get up and come! Come! [*eluntu vāṭi vā*]. (CTU, 69).

As he does throughout, Duḥśāsana addresses Draupadī in the disrespectful form, and she returns him insults in kind.

It is, in fact, the mutuality of the abuse that generates the transformation of the scene into a dynamic possession ritual. Here, of course, one goes beyond the classical epic precedents. Not only do the Kauravas end up looking like "madmen" (*piccarkaḷ*; see sec. B above); so do the Pāṇḍavas (CTU, 80, in the words of Duryodhana). Indeed, Duḥśāsana's possession is just as "contagious" as that of the Raniga, the husband's younger brother of the Kanarese village goddess, who reviles the goddess and all the village officials while the goddess's image is led away from the scene of various animal sacrifices toward the village boundary (see Elliott 1860a, 1: 429–30; Hiltebeitel 1985c, 178–79). As we have seen, the mythical setting for these possessions is in both cases within one family. Aside from the obvious difference between real and symbolic sac-

28. *Māmaṇ*: maternal uncle, father's sister's husband, or husband's or wife's father; *maittuṇaṇ* (colloq. *maccinnaṇ*): husband or wife's brother, maternal uncle or paternal aunt's son, or sister's husband. See further below and chap. 18.

rifices, which I continue to touch on only lightly at this point (cf. chap. 6, sec. C), the chief contrast is that the village myth is set in the past, prior to the ritual, while the Draupadī cult ritual enacts the myth, and sets up the symbolic killings for later ritual enactment within the festival. But there is a deeper link between these two complexes. Both involve a further relative of the goddess: in the Kanarese village ritual the scenes of sacrifice and possession are initiated by another of the goddess's mythic affines, an outcaste ritual specialist called Potrāj whose Draupadī cult counterpart is the iconic figure of Pōttu Rāja. The latter is, of course, given no part in the play "Dice Match and Disrobing." But as my closing chapters will make increasingly clear, it is primarily through his presence in the Draupadī cult *Mahābhārata* that its scenes of sacrifice and possession take on what one might call their "village goddess" dimensions.

In any case, let us now look at the drama from the angle of possession: its portrayal by the actors and inducement among the audience. Having already described the dramatic sequence, I follow the pertinent passages in Irāmaccantira Kavirāyar's drama, which can indeed be read as a "possession score."

Let us first note how Duḥśāsana approaches Draupadī after receiving his initial order to drag her into the sabhā by her hair:

Did she speak this way after becoming a slave? I'll winnow this two-faced little girl like chaff. If she says "stop," claspings her mouth I'll tear it. . . . I'll cut out her tongue if she speaks holding to precept [*nāyam*]. . . . If she speaks of delay, I'll peel her like rind [*cakkaiyāy pērkkirēn*]. (CTU, 62–63)

Even before the issue of the disrobing comes up, it is foreshadowed by extremely violent imagery, an imagery that sets up an analogy between the disrobing and the peeling of fruit. Indeed, the verb *uri*, as it is used in both the title of the play and the episode that acts out the disrobing (CTU, 83–84), means both to "strip" and "to peel." I will return to this point shortly, but for the moment one is reminded that in the dramatists' reworking of the misunderstanding that leads to Draupadī's polyandry, Draupadī must marry her five husbands because their mother mistakes her for a piece of fruit.

Draupadī's status as a chaste wife, not to mention her cult's insistence on her virginity, is repeatedly challenged by Duḥśāsana's assaults on her pride (*mānam*), chastity (*karpu*), modesty (*vetkam*), and purity (*paricuttam*; see CTU, 63–84). And as already remarked, she herself replies with harsh insults of her own. Deepening the

sexual innuendo, the play intensifies its language of possession through two major images: heat and shaking (see also Meyer 1984, 258). Villi uses these images as well, mentioning that Draupadī grows hot at hearing Duḥśāsana's taunts (2.2.231) and that she "trembles" in mind and body (2.2.248, 254) while she calls on Kṛṣṇa during the disrobing. But the play clearly develops these images to further its dramatization of possession.

Thus Duḥśāsana menaces Draupadī behind the rolled up curtain:

O respected Draupadī, if you are really a proud woman, if you are a woman who says you need the love of a hundred and one assigned men [*vititta nūrroruvar aṇṇu vēṇum eṇṇavaḷēy āṇāl*; that is, the hundred Kauravas and their sister's husband, Jayadratha Saindhava], my boiling [*kotitta*] elder brother has asked me to call you into the royal presence [*kolu*]. (CTU, 63)

Then, turning to Gāndhārī for asylum, Draupadī denounces Duḥśāsana as a "lustful person" (*kāmi*), and sings a long lament (*pu-lampal*) that indicates her own troubled state:

As soon as I saw him, my legs trembled [*naṭuṇikutē*], Māmi. . . . If you abandon me and push me out, Māmi, he will take me by force. I trust only you now, Māmi. Don't make me tremble [*naṭuṇikappannātē*], my Māmi. My heart heats up incessantly [*cummā vemputē eṇṇuḷḷam*], Māmi. This time you must protect me, Māmi. (CTU, 65)

Draupadī's trembling underscores the cruelty of Duḥśāsana's taunts about her "wriggling and wiggling." Meanwhile he too grows hot: when Duryodhana finally orders him to disrobe her, he compares Duḥśāsana to a "powerful hot tiger" (*valiya vem puli*; CTU, 81). We see that Duḥśāsana is also shaking and trembling. When he stalks Draupadī to begin to strip her, he tells Duryodhana:

O elder brother, sympathetic with your command my hand is quivering [*pataikkutē en taṇ kaiyāl*]. . . . For doing what you have just said, my hand and leg are quivering [*pataikkutu*]. Like that I am going to strip [her], watch! (CTU, 82)

As Draupadī and Duḥśāsana thus continue to echo each other's words and mirror each other's gestures, the hot trembling and shaking become more and more clearly linked with possession. Spurned by Gāndhārī, hounded out onto the dusty stage, pulled by the hair and swung on the ground before a sabhā that has become nothing else than the village audience, Draupadī says:

Uttering all that cannot be uttered, you leap about [*tullurāy*] like a demon [*pēy*]. You become proud at the admiration of the women. Low person [*nīcan*], you hop and fall down on the ground [*tatti nilattil viḷukirāy*]. Without considering what is censurable, you fall into the fire [*neruppiṇil viḷukirāy*].

Troublemaker, wicked killer, you are bad from birth, a sinner against life. This is disgusting [*aṭācicci*]. Stop raving [*pinattātē*], you villain. Disgusting! Stop raving. (CTU, 68)

And Duḥśāsana replies:

What is this, you fall leaping about so much [*metta metta tullī viḷukirāy*]. You talk without considering how far you can go. (Ibid.)

Let us note how Duḥśāsana's heat and trembling are now intensified by his demonic leaping and images of falling in fire, the latter further juxtaposed to his falling on the ground. Again we have a double evocation of Draupadī's association with the elements of earth and fire. Moreover, her taunt that Duḥśāsana leaps about to impress the women makes sense only when we realize that the village audience has come to constitute the Kaurava sabhā. For in the epic (*Mbh.* 2.62.9–10), Draupadī's humiliation in the sabhā is all the greater because she has been forced into a men's hall where women should not be at all.

But the game of mirrors goes only so far. Though Duḥśāsana and Draupadī drive each other to similar heated states, both of which involve elements of possession, these states are at opposite ends of a spectrum. While Duḥśāsana grows increasingly demonic, Draupadī invites the descent of divine grace. Although my informants assured me there is no possession by demons in the cycle of Draupadī cult plays—as there is, they said, in plays for Māriyamman festivals—it is clear that Duḥśāsana's demonic origins (the hundred Kauravas are all former Rākṣasas) rise to the fore as the scene develops. As Draupadī has already said, he leaps about like a *pēy*, a “demon” or “ghost.” He is also demonically lascivious, arrogant, and stupid. But above all, he is blind when it comes to understanding the miracle of the sarees. Duḥśāsana, as he rants and raves, pulling and pulling, huffing and puffing, can only imagine that the sarees are replenished by Draupadī's “magic craft” (*cittuvittai*), by a trick with mantras (CTU, 82, 84), or even by clever planning ahead:

All the sarees that are removed I have already snapped off. There is only one around you, see! If this one more around you goes, all your purity here will become an open ground [*veṭṭaveli*], immediately! Saying to yourself that we would remove the saree, you thief, did you know it already? In the corner you previously put on a petticoat [*uḷḷāṭai*; "inner garment"]! If I remove this one garment which you put on in advance, you guru of cheats, what will you do then? (CTU, 83)

As Kapferer (1983, 111–238) has shown so beautifully in connection with possession rites in Sri Lanka, demons may seem like masters of illusion, but inevitably it is they who become its victims, trapped by their own ignorance in the illusions they themselves have fostered.

In this regard, however, Hindu mythology (apparently unlike the Buddhist mythology Kapferer describes) also allows for the exception that proves the rule: the "good demon," who is allowed to penetrate to the divine truth of things, though usually at considerable cost either to himself or his family. Most instructive in this regard are such figures as Vibhīṣaṇa and Prahlāda, whose recognition of different *avatāras* of Viṣṇu requires them to repudiate their demonic kin. Among the hundred Kauravas, this role now falls to the youngest: Vikarṇa. Or to put it more precisely, whereas the classical Sanskrit and Tamil *Mahābhārata*s leave open such an interpretation, the Draupadī cult's epic seizes upon it and fleshes it out. In fact, like both Prahlāda and Vibhīṣaṇa (the "good" brother of Rāvaṇa who defects from the Rākṣasa cause in the *Rāmāyaṇa* to take refuge with Rāma), Vikarṇa is allowed in the Draupadī cult *Mahābhārata* to survive the destruction of his demonic kin. While the Sanskrit epic has him die like the other Kauravas at the hands of Bhīma (*Mbh.* 7.112.30), Frasca (1984, 312) has found a performed version of "Eighteenth-Day War," the drama that closes the battle of Kurukṣetra, in which it is indicated that Vikarṇa is the Kauravas' lone survivor, their single remnant.

In the current scene, it is especially Prahlāda who draws the analogy. Draupadī recalls him herself in the disrobing scene, amid her prayers to Kṛṣṇa: "You overcame the quarrelsome Hiraṇyaṇ; by your favor your protected Prahlāda" (CTU, 85). Moreover, as we saw in the first section of chapter 9, a play about Prahlāda, *Piraklāṭaṇ Carittiram*, or "The Story of Prahlāda," is sometimes performed at the beginning of the cycle of *Mahābhārata* dramas, along with a drama about the birth and youth of Kṛṣṇa. Like Prahlāda, who castigates his father Hiraṇyaṇ (i.e., Hiraṇyakaśipu) in his own

demon court for failing to acknowledge the universality of Viṣṇu, Vikarṇa rebukes his father and brothers in their own sabhā.²⁹ And more than this, just as Viṣṇu, as the Man-Lion (Narasimha), miraculously emerges from within a pillar of the demon court to disembowel Hiranyakaśipu, so the same god, as Kṛṣṇa, fills the Kaurava court with sarees and eventually helps the Pāṇḍavas to fulfill the vows they make after the disrobing that will result, in the Draupadī cult *Mahābhārata*, in the disembowelments of Duḥśāsana and Duryodhana.

As with other such “good demons,” then, Vikarṇa’s gesture signifies a recognition of the divine from within a world dominated by demonic lust, power, arrogance, and illusion, and thus becomes the vehicle for the play’s main statements about bhakti. It is he who recognizes Draupadī as “the goddess-wife of the five of long rule, the proper owners of this land” (CTU, 76). When Duryodhana invites Draupadī to sit on his thigh, Vikarṇa warns:

If a chaste lady [*karputaiyōr*] should curse you, even the primal Trimūrti cannot save you, O elder brother. Even after seeing the greatness of this woman, you are so hasty [or “you are trembling”; *pataikkirāy*] to reap censure. (CTU, 87)

But more than this, through his “inside view” of demonic behavior, Vikarṇa’s words provide a running bhakti commentary on the dangers of misdirected possession. The following are his last words of warning to his brothers before the disrobing:

Having no fear of being hindered, there is no truth, no peacefulness [*cāntam*] in a snake. Not fearing for the floodgate, there is no one to stop the deluge. There is no path to a mind gone here and there. Not fearing censure, you have no knowledge [*putti*; Sanskrit *buddhi*]. This lady’s tears are not shed in vain. You are gathered here like a bunch of marijuana drunkards [*caṭaikañcākuṭiyaraippōl*]. You are about to destroy the kingdom. (CTU, 79)

Duḥśāsana’s possession—and that of Duryodhana and all their demonic cronies as well—is like a stupor induced by drunkenness or drugs. It is without the truth, knowledge or insight (*buddhi*)

29. In both *Mbh.* 2.61 and Villi 2.2.237–39, Vikarṇa alone speaks out for Draupadī in the sabhā, but only in one speech. Note, however, that in *Mbh.* 2.61.55ff., Vikarṇa’s speech is compared with an episode from the life of Prahlaḍa in which the latter’s exemplary virtue involves repudiating, not his demon father (the more famous Hiranyakaśipu of the Narasimha myth), but his demon son!

needed to penetrate the illusions the Kauravas have created for themselves. Here we have a continuation and inversion of the Kauravas' bafflement and discomfiture in the Pāṇḍavas' sabhā, which the demon Maya had built with "illusionistic" features that the Pāṇḍavas, unlike their cousins, could penetrate. Still more revealing in the ritual context, as we shall see shortly, is Vikarṇa's observation that the Kauravas' possession is without "peacefulness" or "calm" (*cāntam*; Sanskrit *śāntam*). Moreover, it is again Vikarṇa who gives the final word on the ritual context of Duḥśāsana's possession when the latter is confronted with the futility of his efforts to number and measure the sarees—that is, to measure the infinity of divine grace within the terms of his own arrogance, lust, and ignorance:

Don't speak of measurements³⁰ as you say "Peel, peel." You are going to torture your brothers, your family, life [itself]. The god of truth would tell you, "You will decline right now because of the fire of mind [*maṇaneruppāl*] of the woman with the thin-lined spearlike eyes, O elder brother." . . . Your brothers, yourself, your family, your staff of sovereignty, your life will be ruined in the fire that is the mind, so to say, of this Draupadī [*inta turōpatai maṇam enṇappattā neruppilē aḷiyum*].

Once again, the drama hardly innovates in associating Draupadī with the imagery of fire.³¹ But the ritual context for Vikarṇa's predictions—recall Draupadī's rebuke of Duḥśāsana: "Without considering what is censurable, you will fall in the fire"—are self-evident in a firewalking cult. Indeed, of those who fall on the coals or otherwise injure themselves in the fire, it is inevitably said that they were drunk, or that they had impure sexual thoughts or contact prior to the rite. Duḥśāsana meets these requirements precisely: he is a "marijuana drunkard," has had contact with a menstruating woman, and is "lustful" in his attempt to strip her.

30. I paraphrase here. Vikarṇa actually says: "Don't speak of [such measurements as] the *nāli* [eight "ollocks;" or the twenty-four-minute Indian hour], *uḷakku* [two "ollocks"], or *āḷakku* ["ollock," a dry or liquid measure of quantity or volume]." He is rebuking Duḥśāsana for asking: "By the millions and millions, beautiful and variegated, as the winged white ants come out of the anthill in a great exodus, how many millions (*koṭi*) of sarees must I peel?" (CTU, 85; one *koṭi* or "crore" equals 10,000,000).

31. In the disrobing sequence alone, see Villi 2.2.192, 217, 226 (daughter of the primal fire), 230–31 (her body gets hot at Duḥśāsana's taunts); *Mbh.* 2.60.28 (burning with indignation), 2.60.35 (inflaming her husbands), 2.70.6 and 2.72.18 (capable of burning the Kauravas), 2.61.82 (trembling). On the parrot, cf. also, sec. C, and discussion above.

As to Draupadī, we have observed that her transformation also has elements of possession. Indeed, it is hard to resist this impression when we see her—as Vikarṇa sympathetically describes her—“weeping, sobbing, shrieking, lamenting” (*aḷatu-vimmik kataṛiyē pulampī*), and then rapt in songs of prayer. Here, however, we must proceed cautiously, for technically speaking, according to our chief dramatist informants, only Duḥśāsana becomes possessed, not Draupadī.

On the phenomenon of possession itself, the actors are on certain points quite precise.³² “The coming of possession” (*āvēcam varutal*)—the term *āvēcam* is derived from the Sanskrit *ā-viś*, which the *Mahābhārata* already uses in that sense³³—first builds up as a feeling of being overcome with “anger” (*kōpam*). In this state, possession further involves “the coming of” or “the coming on of the deity” (*cāmi varutal*). So much is clear, as is the insistence that it is Duḥśāsana who is possessed in this fashion, and not Draupadī. But when one looks at the performance context and asks further “what *cāmi*” possesses whom, matters are not so straightforward. For while Duḥśāsana is supposedly the only one possessed, it is Draupadī who would seem to experience the most evident form of *cāmi varutal* with the “coming” of Kṛṣṇa’s grace. It thus appears that as a possession score, the drama stages Duḥśāsana and Draupadī in a “possession continuum” that makes “theological sense” only when we take into account the impact of their interaction upon the audience, for during the hair-dragging and disrobing scenes, members of the audience—usually women but sometimes men—also become possessed. When *āvēcam* comes upon them, they build up their anger in a low growling hum, rise up, shout “Kōvintā, Kōvintā” (Sanskrit “Govinda, Govinda”: I cite it henceforth in Tamil to retain the emphatic vocative ending), flail their arms in the air, and sometimes stalk the stage to beat against Duḥśāsana. For this rude dance, a further name for “possession” enters the picture: *cāmi āṭutal*, “dancing the deity.” Those who perform it can be called

32. What I learned from my two main informants was further corroborated by the young folklore and drama scholar N. Ramaswamy of Madurai Kamaraj University, who spent part of the 1981 festival season with the Raghava Thambiran Terrukkūttu troupe (on which see chap. 7, n. 15), training and acting in the part of Duḥśāsana. Points made additionally by Ramaswamy were then further “confirmed” by my informants. There being no disagreement, I present their description as one.

33. See *Mbh.* 6.86.85, where the warriors appear to be possessed by Rākṣasas and Bhūtas after the death of Irāvata (Aravāṇ; cf. chap. 15), and 10.7.64–65 describing Śiva’s possession of Aśvatthāman as the latter begins his night raid (cf. chap. 18, sec. B).

cāmiyāṭis, a common term in Tamilnadu for “those who dance under the deity’s inspiration.” Clearly Duḥśāsana provokes their anger and possession. But just as clearly, it is Draupadī they identify with. For it is her anger, if not her possession, and her eventual cry “Kōvintā, Kōvintā,” that supply their “possession model.”

This is not, however, to say that we have an answer to who possesses whom, for it may be asked, if Draupadī is their “model,” who possesses Draupadī? The question may be a silly one, for Draupadī is a goddess herself, and I am unfamiliar with deities’ possessing other deities. But it is necessary to raise it because the term *cāmi varutal*, “the coming on of the deity,” seems to suggest the possibility that insofar as it is Kṛṣṇa who “comes” through the calling “Kōvintā, Kōvintā,” it must be Kṛṣṇa who possesses the members of the audience, and by inference their model Draupadī as well. As we shall see, Kṛṣṇa’s “coming” does not in fact mean that he possesses anyone. But the dynamics of the audience possession scenes seem to have misled Frasca on this point. Admitting that “it is difficult to get a clear understanding of what happens during these moments of ritual possession because the concerned parties claim they recall nothing,” he proposes that “they are most probably possessed either by the Pāṇḍavas themselves, who are in chains on-stage, or by Krishna.” The first suggestion has much merit, and Frasca favors it later in his discussion (1984, 301). Indeed, the Pāṇḍavas become “madmen” no less than Duḥśāsana, and provide possession models in other dramatized and ritualized epic scenes as well. But it is the Kṛṣṇa option that intrigues Frasca.

The latter possibility is most interesting in that Krishna is not a deity that normally possesses individuals in the contexts of an Ammaṇ festival; however, it is a distinct possibility that this is the case as the possessed individual always shouts, “Kōvintā, Kōvintā” . . . during the possession.

It is not clear, he adds, whether this latter cry is a “call for assistance” or a “trance identification” with Kṛṣṇa; and, again attracted by the less likely option, he suggests that “if the latter is true, this represents a fascinating and important fusion of the figure of Krishna into what is essentially the cult of possession surrounding Ammaṇ worship in Tamilnadu” (1984, 295).

There is no need to comment here on the historical dimension of this reconstruction, other than to say that a primal Tamil Ammaṇ worship remains hypothetical. But the theological fusion Frasca proposes is without ethnological support, and supposititious. According to my informants—and this applies to actors and audience

alike—the cry “Kōvintā, Kōvintā,” while uttered in a possessed state, brings about a reduction of āvēcam and a feeling of *cāntam*, “peacefulness” or “tranquility.”³⁴ In this light, we can now better appreciate Vikarṇa’s description of Duṣṣāsana’s “drunken” possession as one without *cāntam*. It is the descent of *cāntam* that can transform possession into an experience of divine grace. In the performed version translated by Frasca, this is in effect what happens to Duryodhana when he is possessed during his revilement of Draupadī at the beginning of the drama. In order for him “to come out of the possession,” the chorus sings a song to Kṛṣṇa, asking him for his “compassion” (Frasca 1984, 382). More clearly, it is also what happens within the audience, and it is what the audience experience suggests, despite her official nonpossession, for Draupadī.

Thus, while one is told that Draupadī is not possessed herself, and while one is further never told that she herself possesses anyone in connection with this drama, it is necessary to recognize her part in the drama’s “possession continuum” to make any sense of the question who possesses whom. Indeed, it is the obvious reticence to recognize her possession, and her possession of others, that must be explained. The parallels with other goddess cult possession rituals, and the fact that elsewhere in her mythology and cult such restraints are lifted (see chaps. 13 and 18–19), make it clear that her alleged nonpossession is determined above all by features specific to this drama.³⁵ According to the Tindivanam pūcāri, who is possessed by Draupadī at various points in the ritual cycle, possessed people (as well as others) shout “Kōvintā” while crossing the firepit (and in other ceremonies) “because he is the one people call on for everything. He is the creator of the world. Even Draupadī calls on Govinda.”

I would propose that the most prominent of these restraints is the play’s fidelity to the *Mahābhārata*, and more particularly to Viliputtūr. We shall see how Villi treats Draupadī’s “nonpossession” in a moment, but there is no doubt that just as he inherits from

34. The same terminology and a similar transformation can be noted in the myth that Kāmākṣī of Kanchipuram was changed from *ugra* to *śānta* when the sage Śankara, a Śaivite, installed Kṛṣṇa’s cakra in front of her (Nambiar et al. 1965, 1; cf. chap. 16, sec. A). Other “taming of the goddess” myths, sharing some of these features, are too numerous to mention.

35. See especially Meyer 1984, 257–63, on possession in the cult of Ankālamman, where it is normally this goddess who both possesses and who gives her grace (*aruḷ*), and who is represented as possessed herself. Similarly, even within the Draupadī cult drama cycle, the drama “Aravāṇ’s Sacrifice” represents Kālī as possessed herself, and as possessing certain of the other actors (see chap. 15).

the Sanskrit epic a Draupadī for whom possession would seem incongruous, so Irāmacantira Kavirāyar has inherited the same from him. From her clear-headed question of the "legality" of Dharma's staking her in the dice match to her bhakti abandonment in her prayers to Kṛṣṇa, Draupadī may get hot and tremble. But there is nothing about possession. Moreover, it might seem illogical to think that Draupadī should induce a possession in Duḥśāsana that brings on her own revilement.

Let us remember, however, that we are talking now not only about the Draupadī of the *Mahābharata* but about Draupadī the goddess. As we have seen, the village goddess may not only provoke her revilement but delight in it. Here we must recall that the possession of Duḥśāsana, and more pointedly of Duryodhana before him, is provoked by Draupadī's repeatedly accentuated laughter, her delight at seeing Duryodhana duped by the illusions of the Pāṇḍavas' sabhā. She does not, of course, delight in her revilement itself, but it brings about a situation whereby she—like a village goddess—can only be satisfied by the killing of her tormentors as sacrificial victims. One may suspect that this accentuation of Draupadī's laughter has a telling mythic counterpart in the "loud repeated laughter" (*saṭṭahāsam muhur muhuḥ*) by which Durgā greets the appearance of Maḥiṣāsura, the Buffalo Demon, taunting him and luring him to fight her to his doom (*Devī Māhātmyam* 2.32; Jagadisvarananda 1972, 31). Not only are buffalo sacrifices persistently scenes of possession, but in the Tamil bow song tradition, the enactment of the killing of Maḥiṣa is itself a drama of possession (Blackburn 1981, 222).

In short, we may say that if Draupadī does not possess Duryodhana and Duḥśāsana, she provokes their possession. And we may suspect that she cannot possess them because she is not said to be possessed herself. But in the audience, where the narrative and theological implications of the epic are less imposing, the possessed clearly identify with Draupadī: from her anger to her call "Kōvintā" with its bringing of cāntam. Thus, though it is not said that she possesses the audience either, and though it must not be assumed that there is only one divine source of possession (we have already mentioned Pōttu Rāja and the Pāṇḍavas), we must conclude that it is primarily Draupadī who possesses her devotees.

Yet if the calling of "Kōvintā" is part of the experience of possession by members of the audience, and if it involves an identification with Draupadī at the moment when she makes the same appeal, how are we to understand this appeal itself in relation to possession? Is it just "peacefulness," or a peacefulness of a special

sort? Fortunately, our texts are for once more helpful than our informants. In the play, not surprisingly since he has shared so much with her, it is the faltering Duḥśāsana who recognizes the nature of Draupadī's transformation. While he pulls at her sarees and she prays, he says:

You go on shouting and melting [*oḷuki*] uselessly. Will I fear your melting [*un taṇ oḷukalukkup payappaṭuvēṇō*]? Even if my hand becomes tired, even if I lean to one side, will I leave you alone without causing your disgrace?" (CTU, 86)

But it is Villi who tells us the most, in one memorable—and clearly influential—stanza:

The hot water of the tears from her two large eyes came out,
becoming a river; her hair fell about.

Her hands became tired from holding the loosened saree; not
saying

any other word, crying "Kōvintā, Kōvintā," becoming cool in
her tongue [*kuḷirntu nāvil*],

a nectar that had not flowed [now] flowed [*ūrāta-v-amiltu-ūra*], her body became frightened³⁶ [and] her whole heart
melted [*uḷḷam elām urukināṇlē*].

(2.2.247)

The Tamil words translated here as "melting" each have a different semantic range: *oḷuku*, "to flow, drip, melt, ooze, soften" (the last two meanings, which go beyond the dictionaries, were indicated by Pon Kothandaraman); *uruku*, "to dissolve with heat, liquify, be fused, become tender, melt as in the heart, glow with love." But both are expressive of a pervasive Tamil concept, or better, "feeling," that has been beautifully treated by Margaret Trawick Egnor. I cite her translation of a passage from the richly textured teachings of her main informant, S. R. Themozhiyar, a Śaiva Siddhānta lecturer-philosopher from Chingleput District, whose roots in the village life of what is for our purposes the heartland of the Draupadī cult show through the "nearly magical . . . sounds and images" (Egnor 1978, 6) of his speech:

If you take a fruit, and to find what is the essential substance,
piece by piece, little by little, peeling, peeling, peeling,
peeling [*uricci uricci uricci uricci*], knowing more and more,

36. The commentator Kōpālakirūṣṇamācāriyar (1976–78, 2: 378) explains her "frightened body" as "her hair standing on end."

finally what is the essence? Only the taste is known. When it touches the tongue, only the taste is known. But even the taste is not the essence. Above the taste, in the body there is a feeling [*uṇarcci*] that occurs. It is in the form of that feeling. (ibid., 19)

Says Egnor, "the transition from the ephemeral to the eternal is the same as the transition from the outer to inner. This transition is a softening, a melting, a diminution of substance, until it is empty space, feeling, or light" (ibid.).

Themozhiyar's world of images and feelings is clearly one akin to that of Villiputtūr, Irāmacantira Kavirāyar, and the Draupadī cult Terukkūttu cycle. Let us only recall Duḥśāsana's threat—"I'll peel her like rind from a fruit"—and contemplate the ironies of its outcome. As with Draupadī, for Themozhiyar the "melting" and "softness" of which he speaks are ultimately a "feeling" of the divine, one that transforms the masculine to the feminine, heat to coolness, hardness to softness, weakness to power.³⁷ Indeed, one more of his quotes can serve as a condensation of the whole "Dice Match and Disrobing" scene: "The heart trembles and screams, becomes liquid and melts" (*maṇam patarī katarī kacinturukum*; ibid., 20). For Draupadī, visible recipient of divine grace in the form of endlessly descending sarees, the flow and the feeling are just as Themozhiyar describes: from the trembling, screaming heart, the cry "Kōvintā, Kōvintā," cools the tongue, sets flowing a nectar—*amīḷtu*, probably from Sanskrit *amṛta* but so much more fluid in its sound—that melts and softens her body, defeats the obdurate hardness of Duḥśāsana, and transforms her from an image of weakness to a presence of the inviolable Śakti, the embodiment of Power.

The cry "Kōvintā, Kōvintā"—for Draupadī and, one must assume, for the actors who portray her and the devotees who worship her—brings on a peacefulness or tranquility of a very special kind.³⁸

37. See Egnor 1978, 13, 19–21, 29, 37, 39, 99–103. Curiously, though Themozhiyar uses *uruku* (20), the eight Tamil words that Egnor cites for this "softening and melting of the heart" (20–21) are additional to those cited above.

38. Cf. Dumont 1957, 351, and Roghair 1982, 197, both citing possession scenerios that involve the cry "Govinda," but where there would seem to be no connection with Draupadī. Similarly, I have seen a possessed domestic servant break into this cry at an otherwise stately Brahman dedication of a Kṛṣṇa temple in Madras. Also, Gadabas in East Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh, shout "Govinda" in unison when the stretcher is lifted at funerals (Eisenhauer 1985, 51). Are we to leave Draupadī and the *Mahābhārata* out of our explanations of these scenes? The cry "Govinda" seems to be first and foremost Draupadī's, traceable back through Villi (who gives it its most forceful and compact expression) to both the southern and

And in closing this chapter, I should acknowledge that at least as far as its theology goes, it is not representative of Hindu possession rites in general. It is clearly shaped by the Draupadī cult's vision of the *Mahābhārata*, and by wider South Indian understandings of the relationship between Viṣṇu and the goddess. I would also insist, however, that it is probably not without its lessons for the study of Hindu possession rites. As others have shown, there is often a continuum between possession and bhakti.³⁹ In studying possession rites, even where they involve only possession by demons, heroes, or by a goddess, without any evident "higher" involvement by Kṛṣṇa (or Viṣṇu) or Śiva, it would still be productive to ask what relationship they bear to the full Hindu universe of bhakti.

northern recensions of the *Mahābhārata*, where it occurs amid the apparently interpolated passages that describe Kṛṣṇa's coming to her rescue at the disrobing (see Hildebeutel 1980b, 98–101; *Mbh.* 2.542*, 543* [northern], 545* and 547* [southern], *apud* 2.61.40). It is probably the second line of 2.547*—describing Draupadī as "addressing 'Govinda' and 'Kṛṣṇa' again and again" (*govindeti samābhāṣya kṛṣṇeti ca punaḥ punaḥ*)—that inspired Villi, whether directly or through routes we can only imagine. Cf. also Prabhu 1977, 100–101, on the Kanarese Bhūta ("Demon") cult of the female pair Abbakke-Dharakke, in which mass possessions are "relieved" by uttering the name "Nārāyaṇa." Here too a *Mahābhārata* myth ties into the cult, since Abbakke and Dharakke are the "spirits of two damsels deputed by Indra" to disrupt the penances of Nara and Nārāyaṇa, Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa in their previous joint incarnation as ascetic sages (*rṣis*).

39. Meyer 1984, 257–58; Biardeau, in press; Reiniche 1979, 211–13; and Prabhu 1977, 38, 100–101, 201–7, 213, on Kanarese Bhūta deities and their possession cults within the "englobing" hierarchies of bhakti.

12 Arjuna's Tapas

With "Arjuna's Tapas" (*Arccuṇaṇ Tapacu*) and its occasional sequel "Arjuna Obtains the Divine Diadem" (*Arccuṇaṇ Tēyvaṇpaṭṭam Peru-tal*), the dramatic accent swings back from the gravities of Draupadī to the charmed life of Arjuna. Yet it must be emphasized that these two plays form part of a larger dramatic re-creation of the "exile" sequence in the *Mahābhārata*—the epic's third and fourth books in which Draupadī's darkening aspect comes ever more sharply into view. The subjects of this and the next chapter—both covering dramatizations of the epic's "Forest" and "Virāṭa" parvans—should thus be viewed together as a continuation of this oscillation.

Of the two plays about Arjuna, "Tapas" is one of the most consistently performed in the entire cycle, while "Divine Diadem" is included only when the cycle is extended to the fullest. Where they are performed together, the first ends with the completion of Arjuna's tapas and the second begins with Indra taking Arjuna to Indraloka. But this rather neat demarcation is not made in the published versions of the play, whether in Irāmaccantira Kavirāy-ar's "original" (1857), or in the somewhat modified Irattiṇa Nāyakar edition (1979; henceforth *AT*). Both versions take the action well beyond the scene of Arjuna's tapas to include his encounter with the Apsaras Urvaśī during his visit to Indraloka. But these published dramas do not include the title episode of the second play: Indra's bestowal on Arjuna of the "divine diadem" (Sanskrit *kirīṭa*). This is the subject of a second drama, a version of which has been published but which I was unable to locate.¹ The literary splitting of these two dramas follows the *sarga* (*caruṅkam*) break between the first two sections of the third book (*Āraṇiṇi Paruvam*) of the *Villipārataṁ*. But as it was not followed in practice, I will describe the

1. *Arccuṇaṇ Tēva Paṭṭa Nāṭakam*. It is listed on the backs of several publications by Caṇmukāṇṇanta Puttakacālai (e.g., Nārāyaṇacāmitācaṇ 1978).

division as I encountered it in the field.² I concentrate, as usual, on the innovations and adaptations.

At the advice of Vyāsa, whom the Pāṇḍavas meet in the forest toward the beginning of their exile, Dharma sends Arjuna to obtain Śiva's Pāśupata weapon by performing tapas. Arjuna's advance toward Mount Kailāsa is punctuated by a series of tests and temptations that grow in number and charm as the story develops. In the Sanskrit epic, it is only Arjuna's father, Indra, who takes the form of a Brahman ascetic to test his resolve, questioning how he can pursue tapas while carrying weapons (*Mbh.* 3.38.30–36). The *Villipāratam*, drawing on a tradition apparently introduced by the Kāvya poet Bhāravi in his *Kirātārjunīya* (probably early sixth century A.D.; see Shetterly 1976), has Indra first send a band of Apsarases—Urvaśī, Rambhā, Menakā, and Tilottamā—to distract Arjuna, but the hero is unmoved (Villi 3.1.50). In Irāmacantira Kavirāyar's version of the play (1857, 18–24), these seduction attempts are preceded by an appearance of Viṣṇu in his female form as Mohinī, the Enchantress, who won't leave Arjuna until he prays to Śiva. To this the Irattiṇa Nāyakar edition adds, between the Mohinī and Apsaras flirtations, an episode with a beautiful forest temptress named Pēraṇṭi (elsewhere, Kaṇṭapēraṇṭi, or Pēraṇṭacci): when Arjuna spurns her advances, she lies to her husband, Pēraṇṭan, that Arjuna has raped her, and Arjuna must fight the irate Pēraṇṭan before finally pardoning him at Pēraṇṭi's pleading (*AT*, 15–25).

As in the dramas about Arjuna's additional marriages, these episodes involving his asceticism hold a number of reminders of his affinities with Śiva. The latter is also seduced by Mohinī in various South Indian myths (see Shulman 1980a, 306–15). Like Śiva when Pārvaṭi seeks his affections, Arjuna won't even open his "eye" (*kaṇṇait tiṇantu pārkkavillai*; *AT*, 30) to look at the beautiful Apsarases.

To this litany of self-restraint, however, the unwritten folk epic, as we saw in our discussion of Arjuna's wives, adds two encounters that result in marriage engagements: one to Miṇṇaloḷi, who does not figure in this play but whose story refers to its setting (see chap. 10), and the other to Ellammā, or Ellakkaṇṇi, who does appear in "Arjuna's Tapas." The last of Arjuna's temptations before his encounter with Śiva and Pārvaṭi, her story can be summarized as follows:

2. Full festival versions were observed at Tindivanam in July 1981 by the Verri Viṇāyakar Nāṭakacapai and in Mēlaccēri in June 1986 by the Pakkiriṇṇaiyām troupe, whose two leaders I also consulted earlier on this play. Unless otherwise indicated, I describe the Tindivanam performance.

Ellammā is the daughter of Carantarājan, a “king of the forest.” Even at age five, she is a great Śivabhakta, conducting Śivapūjās. Thinking of Arjuna, whose fame precedes him, she prays to Śiva for a husband who “to my eyes will keep up his chastity,” be handsome, and be a Śivabhakta like herself. Śiva and Pārvatī tell her Arjuna will soon be passing by on his way to Kailāsa; she should stop him and ask him to marry her, and Arjuna will oblige. When Arjuna arrives, he tells Ellammā he cannot marry her during his penance, but if Śiva and Pārvatī have promised it, he will do so after it is completed. And to this Ellammā agrees.

She is a curious figure. The story linking her to Arjuna does not seem to bear any affinity with the known mythology of the Tamil and Telugu goddess Ellammā/Ellamma.³ However, as a goddess of boundaries (Tamil *ellai*), it seems appropriate that the play’s young heroine should share this goddess’s name, for it is this girl who provides the last of Arjuna’s temptations on the boundary, as it were, of the forests and Mount Kailāsa. Yet my two main informants discouraged me from thinking that Ellammā the boundary goddess and the heroine of the play were the same. Alternatively, Oppert’s etymology of Ellammā from Tamil *ellām*, making her the “Mother of All” (1893, 464), is also suggestive. Are we perhaps to understand that this “Mother of All” takes the form of a five-year-old virgin to mark the chaste completion of the “erotic” phase of Arjuna’s tapas? It would not be the only time we see the primal goddess take the form of a little girl.⁴

Once Ellammā withdraws, Arjuna sets himself to climbing the *tapacu maram* or “tapas tree,” a stage prop that finds no mention in the chapbook’s skeletal version of the play. It is a pole—usually the trunk of a palmyra palm—that may range from thirty to an alleged hundred feet in height (at Mānāmpāṭi) and that can be climbed by steps wedged perpendicularly into its trunk at approximately two and a half foot intervals.⁵ This scene, occurring at daybreak, is the culmination of “Arjuna’s Tapas” and the focal point of a number of local rituals that I will treat—along with the sym-

3. This includes Śākta cosmogonies, links with Pōta Rāju as one of his seven sisters, and, like the more distinctly Tamil figure of Māriyamman, links with the ultimately Sanskritic Reṇukā (see Oppert 1893, 464–71; Elmore 1915, 96–97; and below, chap. 16, sec. B).

4. See chaps. 13 and 16, but recall also chap. 5 where Draupadī speaks through a possessed little girl; cf. also Vetschera 1978, 121–25, 142.

5. Frasca (1984, 296) also mentions ■ seventy-foot pole.

bolism of the pole itself—in volume 2. Let me just note that the rituals connected with this scene are very auspicious, in high contrast to the tense and somber atmosphere at Draupadī's disrobing on the previous night.⁶

As Arjuna climbs the "tapas tree," at each step he pauses for songs and prayers to Śiva. Once he reaches the top, he sits cross-legged—a true pillar saint—on a small platform. There he holds his hands in prayer above his head. In this fashion, he completes his tapas, a feat that it is said he could not have accomplished on the ground.

While he is still on high, however, a considerable commotion begins on the ground below him. It is Śiva and Pārvatī disguised as rude forest hunters called Vēṭaṇ and Vēṭacci ("Hunter" and "Huntress"). They are chasing a wild boar (*paṇṇi*), played by one of the heftiest of the musicians with the nickname Yāṇaikkūṭṭi, or "Little Elephant." They know the boar has been sent by Duryodhana to destroy Arjuna's penance.⁷ Cavorting about in mock ecstasy, and chased by the raucous Vēṭaṇ and Vēṭacci, the boar finally seeks to uproot the *tapacu maram*.⁸ At this moment, his penance disturbed, Arjuna shoots the boar to protect himself, splitting its face in two. But at the same instant Śiva, to protect his devotee, releases an arrow that cuts up the boar's body (*AT*, 38).

Arjuna then slowly descends the *tapacu maram*, exchanging threats and insults with the lowly hunter, the two arguing over whose arrow struck first. Finally, he reaches the ground and they challenge each other as to who can hurl the other the farthest. At last Arjuna loses the fight, and Śiva flings him as far as the sky (*ākāyamaṭṭum*; *AT*, 40).⁹ When Arjuna returns, however, the Hunter and Huntress

6. This contrast at least applies to the two dramas as I observed them at Tindivanam. Frasca (1984, 300), however, indicates that the rituals beneath the tapas pole can also be of high and rather somber intensity.

7. The 1986 Mēlaccēri performance had Duryodhana also attempt to destroy, and inadvertently intensify, Arjuna's penance by ordering that the base of the tapas pole be circled by a (straw-lit) ring of fire.

8. See Biardeau 1978, 151–52, attempting to link Mūka in the epic with the cosmogonic boar of classical mythology. The new element here of uprooting the tree might support such an identification, though in an inverse sense, as the boar's intention is to destroy rather than create.

9. There is no mention of Arjuna being mangled during this fight into a "ball of flesh" (*pinḍa*) as there is in *Mbh.* 3.40.49–51. Also, at least in the versions read, observed, and discussed with my informants, the play knows nothing of the early South Indian popular tradition that Arjuna wins the fight, Śiva thereby showing that he lowers himself for his devotees. The theme is traceable to eighth-century Chalukyan art and the tenth-century Pampa *Bhārataṃ*, and is enriched by the "aus-

have suddenly disappeared, and Arjuna is blessed with a vision of two new actors impersonating Śiva (with a cobra hood over his head) and Pārvatī in their "own form" (*corūpam*), supposedly riding the bull Nandi.¹⁰ Śiva then explains why he shot the boar, and he bids Arjuna to request a boon for completing his tapas. Arjuna asks for the Pāśupata weapon, and Śiva bestows it upon him: a striking scene, for during the long moment of exchange Arjuna and Śiva handle the bow Gāṇḍīva and the Pāśupata, Śiva's doomsday weapon represented by an arrow, simultaneously. With this weapon, says Śiva, Arjuna will win the Bhārata war.

Śiva then (though only in the performed versions) requests Arjuna to marry Ellammā, and Arjuna agrees. Finally, Śiva and Pārvatī bless him for the ensuing war and marriage, and disappear. Ellammā comes forth to meet Arjuna for a long scene of acclamation beneath the *tapacu maram*, and then they go together to the Draupadī temple for a brief performance of their wedding. Or so, in any case, was it done by the Pompūr troupe at Tindivanam. According to my two main Terukkūttu informants, however, Arjuna's marriage to Ellammā should await his return from Indraloka with his "divine diadem."

As to the second play, "Divine Diadem," a bare outline must suffice. Indra brings Arjuna to Indraloka, and there Arjuna rules for one and a half hours. While he reigns, Indra orders the Apsaras Urvaśī to dance for him. When she does so, she falls in love with him, but Arjuna rejects her advances, for she is nominally his mother, being an ancestress in the Kuru dynasty. Urvaśī then curses Arjuna to become a eunuch, "half male, half female" according to my chief informants. But Indra gets her to mitigate the curse so that Arjuna can become a eunuch when he chooses. Arjuna then completes his stay in Indraloka, and as his guru's fee to Indra, the latter asks him to conquer the Nivātakavaca and Kālakeya demons. When Arjuna returns victorious, Indra crowns him with the divine diadem. The play closes with him rejoining his brothers and Draupadī with his divine gifts from Śiva and Indra.

picious mark on the back" theme cited in chap. 9, n. 36 (see Nagaraja Rao 1979, 85–91; Venkatesa Acharya 1981, 304).

The theme of Arjuna going to heaven because of Śiva's touch occurs in the Sanskrit epic after the theophany and the bestowal of the Pāśupata (3.41.22–23). The play seems to owe its inspiration to Villi 3.1.112ff., where one finds the same order as the play.

10. As at Tindivanam. In the Mēlaccēri performance, however, Śiva hands over the Pāśupata while he and Pārvatī are still in disguise.

13

Draupadī's Forest Exile and the Period in Disguise: Vīrapāñcālī, Pūvālicci, and Kuravañci

In the normal course of events, the Terukkūttu cycle proceeds from "Arjuna's Tapas" directly to the two plays about the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī's thirteenth year of exile, which they spend incognito in the court of King Virāṭa. In this manner, "Arjuna's Tapas" comes to stand for the whole of the first twelve years of exile in the forest. But it is at best a gloss, for the play tells us precious little about the forest residence of the rest of the exiles, and in particular of Draupadī. A glance at table 6, however, shows that at least two plays may be set in this interval: *Caṃintavaṇ Parikam*, "The Humiliation of Saindhava (or Jayadratha)," and *Turōpatai Kuravañci*, "Draupadī the Gypsy." Both, and especially the latter, give important glimpses into a forest residence that has far richer significance for the Draupadī cult than the usual course of the dramas would suggest. In fact, there is a whole mythology of the forest Draupadī that goes far beyond these two dramas, tapping into regional folklore and welling up into an image of Draupadī that informs not only the drama cycle as a whole but her recognition as a goddess. It also holds implications for the Draupadī cult's image, or images, of Draupadī during her period in disguise.

To get our bearings on this figure, let us keep in mind two classical models: first, the Tamil conventions of the five landscapes that relate to the landscape of the forest, and second, the treatments (both Sanskrit and Tamil) of the forest episodes of the *Mahābhārata*. As Meyer has shown in her discussion of the mythology of Aṅkāḷamman, the links in her cult between the forest and the crematorium recall the classical Tamil conventions of the *pālai tiṇai*, "the landscape of the desert, or the mountain and forest region during the heat of the summer," which "has as its love theme the separation of lovers" (1984, 57). As we shall see, Draupadī's forest transformations share many themes with the mythology of Aṅkāḷamman. It would seem that in both cases, the classical Tamil

poetic conventions are not without their resonances in the mythologies of "village goddesses."

As to the *Mahābhārata*'s forest episodes, those that concern Draupadī are for the most part well known within the Draupadī cult. The first episode to highlight her occurs when the sun god, Sūrya, rewards Yudhiṣṭhira's tapas by bestowing the Akṣayapātra, the "inexhaustible vessel" that Draupadī will use in preparing the Pāṇḍavas' food (*Mbh.* 3.3–4). With this vessel, and with the help of Kṛṣṇa, she miraculously feeds the disciples of the irascible sage Durvāsas, who comes from Duryodhana to embarrass the Pāṇḍavas by demanding food after they have finished a meal (*Mbh.* 3, app. 1, no. 25).¹ According to Brameesa Mudaliyar, these scenes form one of the favorite topics of the pāratīyārs. In addition, they are the subject of a published Terukkūttu-style drama (*Irājakōpāl Paṭaiyākṣiyār*, n.d.), though I have no record of its performance (see chap. 7, n. 17).

Another topic dear to the pāratīyārs is Bhīma's quest for the Saugandhika flower, which occurs on one of two occasions during the Pāṇḍavas' tour of the mountains when Draupadī coaxes him into undertaking dangerous ascents to bring her heavenly flowers (*Mbh.* 3.146–53; 3.157.17–31).² She is also abducted twice, first along with Dharma and Nakula by the Rākṣasa Jaṭāsura, a camp-follower of Baka who covets the Pāṇḍavas' weapons (3.154), and then by Jayadratha, who covets her (3.248–56). The Draupadī cult seems to ignore the Jaṭāsura episode, but Jayadratha's geste is of course the incident leading to his humiliation, the subject of one of our two plays with a forest setting.

A third topic popular with the pāratīyārs, and especially with Brameesa Mudaliyar, drawn in this case only from Villi, is the *nelli* (myrolaban) fruit episode. Having unwittingly cut down a *nelli* fruit from the ashram tree of the sage Amitra (Amittiraṇ), the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī find out from Kṛṣṇa that they can rejoin it to its stem only by uttering a series of "truths." The ultimate truth, the one that completes the miracle, is Draupadī's following admission: "Like the five senses, although I have five husbands, yet still I would like to have one other man for my great husband, my great heart longs. On the great earth, any one born a woman, when they [have] men, say so, she said, she who was like the chaste wife of Vasiṣṭha" (Villi 3.7.21).³ Expostulated upon as a sin-

1. The Poona Critical Edition rejects the latter episode (see Hiltebeitel 1976b, 221–22.)

2. According to Brameesa Mudaliyar (cf. chap. 19).

3. My thanks to Indira Peterson for her help with this passage.

cere admission of feminine frailties, the confession is also sometimes taken as an allusion to a secret affection Draupadī is said to have for Karna (or sometimes for Kṛṣṇa).

For the most part, however, both the Sanskrit and Tamil epic traditions depict Draupadī's time in the forest as one of hardship, grief, and anger over her mistreatment at the dice match, impatience with the forbearance of Yudhiṣṭhira, and thoughts of revenge. She also seems to have no sexual relations during this period,⁴ and to keep her hair dishevelled (see Hildebeitel 1981, 186–201). Along with the attempted abductions, one thus has ample epic material for further development of the *pālai tiṇai* themes of forest estrangement. But nothing in the Sanskrit or Tamil epics, or in the discourses of the *pāratyārs*, can prepare one for the transformations that the "forest Draupadī" undergoes in the dramas, and especially in the folklore, of her cult.

A. Virapāncālī

Let us recall the invocatory songs to Draupadī as "the lady who resides in Gingee." Like a "glimmering mirage," she lights the Pāṇḍavas' forest path. She sleeps with the borders of the paddy fields for her pillow. The forest is indeed her special residence, and while there she is her husbands' divine helper, taking the form of Vīraśakti, the goddess as "Heroic Power."

Her associations with the forest also extend beyond the limits of her twelve years of exile. Songs and dramas refer to her as a "forest parrot." At Tiruvannamalai she has her "Forest Draupadī-amman Temple" (*kāṭṭuttirauṇṇamman kōvil*). And at Mēlaccēri, it is at the border of the forest that she has her temple of origins, the same forest to the north of Gingee in which she took her second birth to defeat Acalammācuran, the descendant of Baka. Indeed, there she is still said to roam free in her "fierce form" (*akōra uruvam* or *rūpam*; Sanskrit *aghora rūpam*) as Virapāncālī (see plate 6). As Meyer points out, Aṅkālamman's *akōra rūpam*, which she manifests in the crematorium, recalls Koravai, "the goddess who in the *Cilappatikāram* is associated with the *pālai tiṇai*" (1984, 57; cf. 37, 221), where she is worshipped by the wild forest hunters and warriors.

Furthermore, we have already noted certain *Mahābhārata* folk dramas that draw upon the forest setting as a scene for Draupadī's transformations. "The Killing of Kempirṇācuran, or Draupadī Be-

4. This is never made explicit, but is hinted at when Arjuna, after five years of tapas and despite a loving welcome from Draupadī, spends his first night back sleeping next to the twins (*Mbh.* 3.161.29).

comes a Stone" is of ambiguous setting, for although it is once said to occur after the thirteenth year of exile, it ends with the Pāṇḍavas moving from their third to their fourth forest (Kōṭaṇṭarāma Upatīyāyar 1974 [henceforth *TKC*], 24, 44). In it Draupadī invokes her chastity in an "act of truth" to transform herself temporarily into a stone upon the touch of the demon. More interesting, though, in our present context is the play's dedicatory formula. All the chapbook plays open by calling upon one deity or another, but this play is only one of two—the other being "Pōrmaṇṇa's Fight"—that call upon Draupadī as *Virapāṇḍālī* (*virapāṇḍālī tuṇai*).⁵ More decisive, however, is the unpublished drama "Maddened Bhīma Fights Malaiyukācuraṇ," in which the demon of the title, who handles Kṛṣṇa and Bhīma as trifles, is finally overcome by Draupadī in her *Virapāṇḍālī* form. Indeed, like the hundred-headed demon she defeats in the Mēlaccēri Forest, Malaiyukācuraṇ—apparently, the "Mountain-Yuga Demon"—is another revenge-seeking "folk" descendant of Baka: this time his very own son (see chap. 10, n. 1). As with *Acalammācuraṇ*, it once again requires one of Draupadī's heroic and fearful forest transformations to achieve the demon's defeat.

But what is it that makes the forest Draupadī, this *Virapāṇḍālī*, such a certain match for these voracious and even cannibalistic demons? To put it simply, Draupadī is a cannibal herself. When I first heard this from a Telugu-speaking Brahman from Vijayawada in April 1975, I was stunned. To be sure, one hears similar things about *Aṅkāḷammaṇ* and *Kālī*, and that various goddesses earn such reputations from their propensities to assume *kālirūpa* ("the form of *Kālī*").⁶ But how could the cannibalistic theme be adapted to the known mythology of Draupadī?

The Telugu account, said by my informant to be widely known and derived from the Telugu *Mahābhārata*, locates the revelation of Draupadī's cannibalism prior to the forest exile:⁷

5. Other chapbook dramas begin with invocations of such deities or divine names as Kṛṣṇa, Kaṭavuḷ ("God"), Rāma, and Devī.

6. Local informants at Tindivanam insisted that only *Aṅkāḷammaṇ* eats dead bodies. At Veḷḷimēṭupēṭṭai, the distinction was made that Draupadī eats creatures only while she roams the forest, not dead bodies like *Aṅkāḷammaṇ*. On *Aṅkāḷammaṇ*'s devouring of the dead, see Meyer 1984, esp. 149, 168, 215; on *Aṅkāḷammaṇ* and *Kālī*, see *ibid.*, 217. The goddess Kāmākṣī of Kanchipuram is said to have assumed *Kālirūpaṃ* and ravaged the countryside at night until she was tamed by Śankarācārya (Dave 1970, 272–73). Cf. also Shulman 1980a, 195, and Fawcett 1890, 281: an account from the outskirts of Madras in which *Kālī* ate a Brahman each night until Śankara intervened and subdued her, arranging to supply a buffalo sacrifice instead.

7. I assume my informant referred to the epic as it is known through Telugu folk traditions. Velcheru Narayana Rao assures me the story is not from the classical Telugu *Mahābhārata*. The account was given in English.

During the year in which Bhīma has his turn as Draupadī's consort after her polyandrous marriage, he despairs of satisfying her sexually, and tells Kṛṣṇa of his troubles. Kṛṣṇa says it is no surprise, considering who she really is, and takes Bhīma at night to the crematorium. There they see her decked in gore excitedly devouring corpses, and then recovering her familiar appearance and returning home. Kṛṣṇa explains that Draupadī is the primal Śakti, who had once been promised by Viṣṇu that in a future birth she would have enough human flesh to satiate her. To achieve this, Kṛṣṇa has taken human birth to engineer the *Mahābhārata* war and provide corpses for Draupadī to devour during nighttime ravages on the battlefield. But in response to Bhīma's initial problem, Kṛṣṇa gives him a portion of his own energy. When Bhīma and Draupadī make love, however, she knows its source and tells Kṛṣṇa that now that he has had sexual relations with her, he must marry her. Kṛṣṇa accepts this, but only for a future life when he will be Lord Jagannātha of Puri, and she will be one of his wives.⁸

Presented with such a surprising account near the beginning of my study, I began to ask informants whether Draupadī had a similar story in her cult in Tamilnadu. The notion that she is voracious sexually was soon dropped from the inquiries when it became apparent that she is always described as a virgin. But her appetite for human and animal flesh was not unknown. It quickly became apparent that most pāratīyārs found the notion not only textually unfounded but repugnant. But others—above all my two main Terukkūttu informants, and also various local village informants—were familiar with the following basic story:

From the beginning of her life in the forest to the end of the *Mahābhārata* war, the period when she wears her hair dishevelled awaiting revenge for her treatment at the dice match, Draupadī nightly takes on the "form of Kālī" (Kālirūpa), her "universal form" (Viśvarūpa). And while her husbands sleep, she roams about from midnight to 3 AM, devouring whatever comes her way. In the forests she eats goats, buffaloes, wild animals, even human beings. And during the war she will go out to consume the bodies of the

8. I do not know what Draupadī's destiny is in this context, but according to Frédérique Marglin (personal communication), under the name of Harachandi, Draupadī is worshipped as the guardian of the southern boundary of Puri; cf. the position of Duḥśālā at Chinna Salem (chap. 6, n. 24, and map 5).

dead. Only Kṛṣṇa knows this, until one night during their forest residence (*vaṇavācam*) Bhīma awakens to see Draupadī return and asks Kṛṣṇa about it. Kṛṣṇa tells Bhīma of Draupadī's outings and informs him that they represent a grave danger to the Pāṇḍavas. She will devour them too if they try to stop her. But worse, should she merely return home unsatiated, she will do the same. At Kṛṣṇa's advice, the Pāṇḍavas thus close her up at midnight in their palm leaf hut (*pañṇaka cālai*) and refuse to let her out until she promises not to harm them.

The venue of this revelation is thus not the palace bedroom or crematorium of the Telugu myth, but the leafy hut of the forest exile. The *pañṇaka cālai* (variants are *pañṇa* and *parṇa cālai*, all from Sanskrit *parṇa śāla*, "leafy hut") is a regular feature of the Pāṇḍavas' forest life in the Terukkūttu plays. But it is especially connected with Draupadī. In "The Humiliation of Saindhava" and "Draupadī Becomes a Stone," Duryodhana's allies come to abduct Draupadī when she is left in the *pañṇaka cālai* unprotected (CN, 30–43; TKC, 36).

Draupadī shares the leafy hut with other goddesses and heroines. Aṅkāḷmaṇ, disguised as a treacherous midwife, insists on delivering the baby of a queen, whose belly she will rip open, "in a forest [*kāṭu*], in a hut made of thatch" (Meyer 1984, 188; see below, chap. 16, sec. B). The leafy forest hut should also be a place where the goddess or heroine can be left inviolate, as indeed was Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa's intention when they left Sītā unattended in the *Rāmāyaṇa* before her abduction by Rāvaṇa.⁹ But most intriguingly, one is reminded of the so-called Draupadī Ratha at Mahabalipuram, an apparent Durgā temple from the Pallava period in the shape of a leaf- or straw-roofed hut. Perhaps the folk tradition that has persisted in naming this temple after Draupadī has drawn upon the associations of her forest exile. As we shall see in chapter 15, it is entirely appropriate that a "forest Draupadī temple" should reveal a Durgā within receiving a head offering from a warrior. In any case, the leafy hut with Draupadī confined within it evokes the temple of a powerfully destructive virgin goddess. Draupadī's *pañṇaka cālai* figures as a vivid example of the "sealed shrine" or "locked temple" motif that Shulman has analyzed in numerous Tamil goddess myths: "The locked doors of Devī's shrine represent

9. Rāvaṇa comes to find Sītā unprotected in her forest hut. In some folk versions, he must lure her outside before he can abduct her. Similarly, Jayadratha must trick Draupadī into stepping out of the *pañṇaka cālai* in CN, 36–43.

her virginity, that is, the state in which her sacred power is intact and therefore strongest" (Shulman 1980a, 194). As such myths show, the unleashing of this power can have terrible consequences for the goddess's husband or bridegroom, so in some cases he attempts to keep her imprisoned, either in her temple or in some enclosure that symbolizes it (ibid., 162–63, 192–98, 256–57, 278, 285).

In Draupadī's case, it would seem that the conspiracy by Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇḍavas to contain her forest power must, if anything, be a means of channeling it toward its true objective: the destruction of the Kauravas. But in its epic context, the myth is not completely resolved. If she has such power, how can she really be locked up in a leafy hut? The story would remain our only version, however, if the dramatist informants who provided me with one of its most coherent tellings had not supplied a surprising variant a half year later. This second story was volunteered quite unexpectedly in response to a question about Arjuna's children: is he the father of one of Draupadī's five sons, the "Young Pañcapāṇḍavas"?¹⁰ No, she is a virgin. How then were the five children born? In answer, the story of Draupadī's nighttime depredations runs its usual course until Kṛṣṇa gives his advice. But instead of urging Draupadī's containment, he tells the Pāṇḍavas to lock her out of the hut—a reversal of the "sealed shrine" theme, like others observed by Shulman (1980a, 199–202, 218–23, 393 n. 39)—until she promises not to harm them.

But that very night Draupadī comes back tired, thirsty, very hungry, and ferocious, and ready to eat her husbands. She bangs on the door. Bhīma stands there holding it shut, and refuses to open it unless she promises not to eat them or harm the Pāṇḍavas in any way. At last she assents. Bhīma then lets the door slightly ajar so as to let her touch her fingers to his hand in the gesture of taking an oath [*cattiyam paṇṇi ceyyu*]. But Draupadī grips him so hard that her five fingernails pierce his hand. Five drops of blood thus fall to the ground and immediately turn into five children who rise up shouting "Ammā!" "Mother!" The sight of the five children calling her "Mother" then pacifies Draupadī, and she returns from her Viśvarūpa back to her normal form.

Once again, of course, this calming of the goddess is not meant to be definitive: she will have other nights of roaming.

10. I use here as elsewhere the Draupadī cult name for the sons (*īlampañcapāṇṭa-varka!*); see chap. 18, sec. B.

These remarkable Draupadī cult stories are both concerned with Draupadī as Vīrapāñcālī, for her Kālirūpa, Aghorarūpa, and Viśvarūpa are forms that she takes in connection with her "heroic" (*vīra*) role. As such, she is extremely aggressive, highly dangerous, and emphatically impure. Moreover, in the last account she is unmistakably masculine. Once again it is the robust Bhīma who is overmatched by her sexual "potency," this time not so much through his own inadequacies as by her unexpected and "heroic virility." She causes the birth of her sons by penetrating his skin with her fingernails.¹¹ By making his blood drops fertile, she reverses the usual male-female roles, which are said to involve the fertilization of female blood by male seed (see O'Flaherty 1980, 33–39, 48; Marglin 1982, 312–13). Indeed, following Marglin's insights here, Draupadī's posture of standing on the prone bodies of her demon foes—not only Acalammācurāṇ but Duryodhana (see sec. C below; chap. 18, sec. B; and plates 6, 32–33)—can be seen as an inverse sexual position reminiscent of the destructive and inauspicious dancing stance of Kālī, the goddess whose form the forest Draupadī assumes. It is in that pose that Kālī revives and indeed sexually awakens the prone body of the "corpse" Śiva in Tantric iconography.

This account is obviously at variance with the classical Sanskrit and Tamil story, which has Draupadī conceive her five sons normally, before she enters the forest. But it is also more focused on her fierce and heroic dimensions than certain other accounts that have been influenced by her cult. It thus differs from what Draupadī says of herself, while disguised as a gypsy, in a ballad version of the last play we shall discuss in this chapter. There, as a mysterious gypsy fortune-teller, she reveals that she has never been touched by her husbands, and that her sons were born by means of mantras (Pukaḷēntippulavar 1909, 35). It is also at variance with accounts presented by two different pāratyār informants. Preserving the basic outline of the classical story as well as the cultic requirement of Draupadī's virginity, the latter posed alternate "gnostic" solutions. Kothandarama Goundar recounted that while there was an ordinary human Draupadī who bore sons normally, the true Māyā Draupadī, or Māyā Pāñcālī, would emanate from the ordinary Draupadī and assume the fierce virgin forms we are considering.¹² And Brameesa Mudaliyar taught that Draupadī con-

11. Cf. chap. 10, n. 1: Draupadī's thumb nail, planted, turns into a flower, then a weapon.

12. Similarly numerous post-Vālmīki versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* introduce a Māyā Sītā to solve the problem of her contact with Rāvaṇa (see O'Flaherty 1984, 92 and n. 22).

ceived her five sons as mirage-like beings from her sweat pores.¹³ There is perhaps a suggestion of the impure and violent in this second account, however, for *Aṅkāḷamman* also gives birth to the fierce *Virabhadra*, as well as her other guardian children, through her sweat pores (see Meyer 1984, 186–89, 233).

The image of Draupadī as *Virapāñcālī* is thus deeply rooted in local cultic sources and attains its clearest synthesis and widest diffusion through the epic-related folklore of the *Terukkūttu*. With these factors in mind, it is time to look at the dramas that build most immediately on this image: the ones in which the forest Draupadī moves into the period in which she and the *Pāṇḍavas* must conceal their identities. Beneath her disguises—one traditional to the *Mahābhārata*, the other a folk innovation—her sylvan violence remains ever ready to erupt.

B. Pūvālicci: Draupadī the “Flower Stringer” in the Kingdom of Virāṭa

The *Terukkūttu* drama cycle almost uniformly presents enactments of the period that the *Pāṇḍavas* and Draupadī spend incognito in the kingdom of *Virāṭa*. Either the two plays *Kīcaka Cammāram*, “The Slaughter of *Kīcaka*” (1962; henceforth *KC*), and *Māṭupīṭi Caṇṭai*, “The Fight over the Cattle Raid” (*Irākavamūrtti* 1979; henceforth *MPC*), are performed in sequence or else one—sometimes incorporating incidents from the other—may stand for the *Virāṭaparva* as a whole.¹⁴ I will follow the story as it is developed through the two dramas, drawing mainly on their chapbook renditions.¹⁵ As for the most part they follow the classical precedents, I will proceed rather rapidly, accentuating only the most significant scenes and the innovative departures.

13. This explanation was made with reference to Upaniṣadic teachings about the four different types of birth (womb, egg, sweat, and sprout; *Āitareya Upaniṣad* 3.1.3), and to a story allegedly from the Tamil *Kantapurāṇam* in which a form of the goddess, *Māyādevī*, gives birth to hundreds of thousands of children by sweating. Cf. Roghair 1982, 195.

14. *Māṭupīṭi Caṇṭai* has in fact the alternate title *Virāṭaparva Nāṭakam*, which is sometimes used for the single play when only one is performed. As with the dramas on Draupadī's wedding and Arjuna's tapas, the material from the two dramas can be variously combined under one title.

15. The first half of *Kīcaka Cammāram* was observed in festival context at Tindivanam on 11 August 1977, and a shortened version was observed on 15 January 1982, both by the *Pakkiripālaiyam* troupe. Another play on the same theme as *Māṭupīṭi Caṇṭai* is found in *Muñicāmi Nāyakar*, n.d.

Before they enter Virāṭa's kingdom, the Pāṇḍavas conceal their weapons in a *vaṇṇi* (śāmī) tree, and Dharma worships the goddess Kālīkāparamēcuvāri, asking her to protect the weapons until the Pāṇḍavas return for them. If the weapons should be approached by anyone but Arjuna, they will turn into snakes (KC, 14–15; MPC, 65).¹⁶ We have noted the significance of this episode in connection with Vaṇṇiyar marriages and myths of Vaṇṇiyar caste origins (see chap. 3). As Biardeau has shown, the śāmī, as the horizontal and feminine of the two Vedic firesticks, represents the "matrix of fire, in which fire resides in a concealed state" (1981a, 219). Hidden in this "fire tree" (*vaṇṇimaram*), the weapons' own fiery character will remain in a latent state, awaiting their use in the sacrifice of battle. Moreover, they will be protected by the goddess of Victory (in the epic passage in question, the goddess is referred to primarily as Durgā, the slayer of the Buffalo Demon, but also as Kālī). In effect, the incident presupposes the śāmīpūjā that is performed as part of the royal ceremony of Vijayādaśamī (or Dasarā) in conjunction with other rites involving the honoring of the royal weapons and the freeing of the boundaries (*śīmollaṅghana*) of the royal capital (ibid., 224–26; cf. above, chap. 3, sec. C, and chap. 4, sec. B).

In a burlesque scene, the Pāṇḍavas then come before Virāṭa one at a time in their various disguises. The last to arrive, more somber than her predecessors, is Draupadī. Of the disguises, we need mention only those of Arjuna and Draupadī. The former chooses this time to bring to fruition the curse of Urvaśī that he would become a eunuch (*pēṭi*). It will be recalled that the specific form of this curse, according to my two main Terukkūttu informants, is that Arjuna will be "half male, half female." That is indeed the way the Pakkiriṭṭaiyām troupe portrays him. Under the feminine name *Pirukaṇṇalai* (Sanskrit *Bṛhannaḍā*), Arjuna's left side has a breast, light rose facial coloring, long hair, and anklets, while his right side bears winglike epaulettes, blue facial coloring, a mustache, and a peacock crown (see plate 14; cf. Hildebeitel 1980c, 153–54). It is clear that the eunuch Arjuna is portrayed here as an evocation of Śiva Ardhanārīśvara, "the lord who is half woman." Indeed, the connection is not without its classical epic precedents (see Hildebeitel 1980c, 151–58; 1984a, 25).

Draupadī enters with her hair loose (as observed at Tindivanam), delivering a song in soliloquy that reveals that she is Ammaṇ-Pāṇḍālī, "born from red fire" (*cen taṇaliṛ piranta*), the chaste and

16. Arjuna's processional images can show his bow Gāṇḍīva with a snake's head at the top and tail on the bottom.

very beautiful sister of Kṛṣṇa “whose color is like the black clouds” (*kārmēka vaṇṇaṇ*) (KC, 31). She retains from the classical tradition the name Caiyintarati/Cayintarati (KC, 12, 30; from Sanskrit Sair-andhrī), and she defines her tasks as those of a servant (*aṭiyāl*) and chambermaid (*paṇippen*; a *vaṇṇamakal* in Villi 4.1.29ff.) who will work for Virāṭa's queen, Sudeṣṇā (KC, Cutēksaṇai; MPC, Cutark-kaṇai), and dress her hair with flowers (*mālār mutittal*; KC, 12; cf. 32–33). Let us recall that in early nineteenth-century Dindigul, the processional drama that enacted the year of disguises provided Draupadī with a more distinctive name: Pūvālicci, “Flower Stringer” (see chap. 3, sec. C). One does not seem to find this name in the current dramas. But the name only echoes the main task she will perform as a paṇippen. There is, of course, great irony here, for Draupadī's disguise evokes the vow she herself is keeping not to put up her own hair until she can do so with Duryodhana's blood. As one who is to dress a queen's hair with flowers, Draupadī's disguise thus portends the war to come, which cannot be ended until her own hair will be dressed—in the scene that closes the Terukkūttu cycle—with red or orange flowers. The flowers provide ritual accentuation of a link that is already implied in the classical epic between Draupadī's dishevelment and her disguise as a hair-dresser-Sairandhrī (see Hildebeitel 1981, 191–99).

Indeed, the tale of the flowers continues. A song describes Draupadī picking flowers, mentioning different flowers in great number (KC, 40–41), and it makes her return from this outing the occasion on which she is first seen by Kīcaka, the powerful and lustful younger brother of Queen Sudeṣṇā. This setting is derived from *Villipāratam* 4.3.2; in the Sanskrit epic (4.13.2–5) it is not mentioned where Kīcaka first sees her. Sudeṣṇā is convinced by her brother to make Draupadī available to him,¹⁷ and, again following Villi's precedent, she sends Draupadī to Kīcaka with a garland of flowers (KC, 53; Villi 4.3.18). In the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, Sudeṣṇā has Kīcaka prepare a holiday meal of fine meats and liquor and makes this the pretext for sending Draupadī to him with a golden goblet to fetch some liquor for her (4.14.5–17).

17. In the play, he does this mainly by the threat that if he does not get Draupadī, he will die, and this will result in his sister's becoming a widow (KC, 48) since it is Kīcaka who has won the kingdom for the weak Virāṭa, and who continues to protect it and him. The Kaṭṭiyaṅkāraṇ provides a special aside that Sudeṣṇā remains a “very chaste woman” (*mikunta karpuṭaiyāl*), and that though she doesn't know it, the real reason she has changed her mind in finally giving in to Kīcaka is that he is destined to be killed by Bhīma (KC, 53).

One may suspect that for the Draupadī cult, and no doubt for Villi, the flowers are no less ominous than the meat and liquor, which evoke the role Draupadī and Bhīma will play together in the killing of Kīcaka as a paired multiform of Durgā, the slayer of the Buffalo Demon, the goddess who delights in meat and wine. I will have more to say on flower-stringing later. To proceed rather quickly through the rest of this drama, when Draupadī entices Kīcaka to a nighttime tryst, she has arranged it so that he will embrace not her but Bhīma. And the latter, dressed up in the Terukkūttu as Draupadī herself—an “improvement” that owes at least its immediate inspiration to *Villipāratam* 4.3.63¹⁸—will tear Kīcaka in two (KC, 76, 83). This collaboration between Draupadī and Bhīma combines the former’s seductiveness and the latter’s violence. The result is a unique image of the goddess-hero that finds its counterpart, and quite likely its source (even though the texts are later than the *Mahābhārata*), in the purāṇic myths in which Durgā replies to the messengers of her lustful demon foes—sometimes Śumbha and Niśumbha, in other texts Mahiṣāsura himself—that she will marry only one who conquers her in battle, and thus sets up a tryst that will result in her killing the demon who expects to conquer her in love.¹⁹

It is striking that this drama on the disguises accentuates transvestism in connection with both Arjuna and Bhīma. In the former’s case, it evokes the bisexual Śiva, the form in which Śiva and Śakti, *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, are merged into one. In the latter’s, it evokes one of the most violent dimensions of the masculinely heroic virgin goddess of war. We shall see that Bhīma and Arjuna continue to provide expression for such images throughout the drama cycle. The important point for now is that they are first unveiled, during the period of disguise, as dimensions of the heroes that identify and indeed unite them with Draupadī.

The drama *Kīcaka Cammāram* is also linked with possession rituals. When Kīcaka seizes Draupadī and tries to rape her, the play provides a second scene like that in “Dice Match and Disrobing” in which members of the audience—and especially women—become possessed and assault the villain, both verbally and with their flailing arms.²⁰ Finally, it is Kīcaka’s polluting touch that is some-

18. This is also done in the Yakṣagāna dramas of Karnataka (Ashton and Christie 1977, 43); in the Sanskrit epic it is not clear whether Kīcaka’s failure to recognize Bhīma is due to his lust, to the darkness, or to a similar change of clothes.

19. Cf. chap. 4, n. 16, and the goddess’s taunting laugh in chap. 11, sec. C.

20. I must rely on oral descriptions of this scene, as I have not seen the drama through to its conclusion in its festival context (see n. 15).

times cited as the reason Draupadī eventually undergoes her purificatory firewalk (see chap. 19).

The second Virāṭaparvan play, "The Fight over the Cattle Raid," begins with Duryodhana trying to figure out where the Pāṇḍavas are hiding: if they are exposed, he can demand that they return to the forest. He sends out messengers and finds two hints that they are in the kingdom of Virāṭa. First, hearing of the death of Kicaka, he deduces that only Bhīma could be responsible (MPC, 13–14). Second, when Bhīṣma announces that the Pāṇḍavas would bring happiness, fertile lands, good rains, and other such blessings to whatever kingdom they dwelt in, Duryodhana learns from his ambassadors that of all the fifty-six countries, the one having the greatest prosperity (*celippu*) is Virāṭa's. It is noteworthy that the chapbook refers to Virāṭa's kingdom in this context as Maccatēcāma, "Fish Country," and his capital, also the most prosperous of all capitals, as Maccanakar, "Fish City" (MPC, 12–15). One suspects that the proverbial prosperity of the kingdom has thus been linked to its association with the fish. In any case, the passage has a classical preeminence (see *Mbh.* 4.27.12–27; 4.29.9–10) throughout Tamilnadu, where it is the basis for ritual readings of Sanskrit or Tamil versions of the *Virāṭaparvan* to stimulate local rainfall.²¹

To flush out the Pāṇḍavas, Duryodhana calls on his ally Tirikkartan (classically Suśarman, king of Trigarta), whom the play provides with a new incentive to oppose the Matsyas by making him their former king (MPC, 15). He proposes raiding Virāṭa's cattle, and when Duryodhana agrees, Tirikkartan attacks Virāṭa's capital from the south and draws into battle not only the king but Dharma and Bhīma. Bhīma eventually defeats Tirikkartan and rescues Virāṭa, but before they can return home, Duryodhana mounts his own cattle raid of Matsya from the north of the capital (MPC, 41).

When the news of this second raid reaches the undefended palace, Sudeṣṇā commands her serving maids (*tātimārkaḷ*) to arm themselves and dress as warriors in order to deceive Duryodhana's army. It is again Villi (4.4.28) who provides the classical precedent, and in both Villi and the drama the would-be girl warriors provide a fitting reversal of the transvestism of Arjuna and Bhīma, and a prelude to a further inversion that now takes place (cf. Shulman

21. See Diehl 1956, 264; Hemingway 1907, 1: 88; Thurston 1912, 30; cf. Elliot 1860b, 2: 72–74 (for Karnataka); and Moses 1922–23, 554, and Das 1932, 96 (for Vizagapatam in Andhra). Within Tamilnadu, Dharapuram in Coimbatore District has local renown as Virāṭadeśa for its good rainfall and cattle; see Nambiar et al. 1968a, 108–9; Hildebeitel 1980b, 104–5 and n. 36 (citing similar "localizations" from other parts of India).

1985, 271). When the Matsya prince Uttara (Uttirakumāraṇ) appears and sees the girls arming themselves, Sudeṣṇā appeals to him to defend the capital. From here on things take their traditional course. He protests that he has no charioteer, but Draupadī recommends the eunuch Arjuna. The eunuch and the timid prince then retrieve the weapons from the Vannimaram (it is apparently to the north of the capital, as that is the direction Arjuna must go to meet the Kauravas). Arjuna discloses to Uttara his own and the other Pāṇḍavas' and Draupadī's identities. Once the two have reversed their positions as warrior and charioteer, they turn back the Kauravas' cattle raid. This episode involving Arjuna has a markedly humorous and triumphally auspicious tone, and it clearly contrasts once again with the somber confrontations between Draupadī and Kīcaka. It is also the basis for certain ritual reenactments that I will discuss in volume 2.

The closing scenes then take place back at the capital. It is reported that Arjuna and Uttara have won their fight, but before they return Virāṭa challenges Dharma to a game of dice to determine whether it was Arjuna or Uttara who actually fought to achieve the victory. When Dharma wins, Virāṭa gets angry and throws the gambling pieces at him. They hit his forehead (*nerri*) and cause a wound. Immediately Draupadī comes forth with the endpiece (*muntāṇi*; common form of *muntāṇai*) of her saree to stanch the bleeding (MPC, 89). As it stands, this scene must also be traced to Villi (4.4.126–27), who has Draupadī wipe clean the tilakam-like forehead wound with her saree, for in the Sanskrit epic the bleeding comes from Dharma's distinctively large nose, and Draupadī keeps the blood from falling with a golden bowl (4.63.46–47).

As we have seen, however, the gesture with the *muntāṇai* has been given still wider play in the Terukkūttu, where it is also adapted to the equally "new" scene in which Draupadī stops the bleeding of Kṛṣṇa's finger after he has thrown his discus at Śiśupāla (see chap. 11, sec. A). There it foreshadows "Dice Match and Disrobing," in which the ends of sarees, tied one to another, literally cover the stage ground in the play's climactic scene. The juxtaposition of the two *muntāṇai* scenes is also significant. The second dice match is one that Dharma wins, portending the Pāṇḍavas' victory at Kurukṣetra, and there is the hint that Draupadī prevents destructive consequences by keeping the blood from touching the ground. In the *Mahābhārata*, this is made clear when Dharma tells Virāṭa, "Surely, if that blood from my nose had fallen on the earth, you and your kingdom, O king, would undoubtedly have per-

ished" (4.64.68).²² Let us recall what happens when Draupadī causes the blood of Bhīma to sow itself in the earth: her five sons, all Rākṣasas according to the Terukkūttu folklore of the Draupadī cult, immediately sprung up from the ground. One is reminded of the mythology of the demon Raktabīja ("Blood-Seed"), whose blood drops also spring up as new demons like himself whenever they touch the ground (*Devī Māhātmyam* 8.40–63; Jagadisvarananda 1972, 111–16). Like Kālī who prevents disaster by drinking up Raktabīja's blood drops before the ground regenerates them, Draupadī thus prevents the Pāṇḍavas from avenging themselves against Virāṭa and destroying the very kingdom that has been the refuge against the day of their own regeneration and victory (see Hildebeitel 1981, 196–97).²³ As the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* puts it, the kingdom of Matsya is the "womb" (*garbha*; 4.12.11; 4.66.10) in which the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī must gestate before they are ready to be reborn to their greatest tasks.

Finally, the play ends with Virāṭa realizing who all the exiles are and arranging the marriage of his daughter Uttarā (Uttarai) to Arjuna and Subhadra's son, Abhimanyu (Apimannan).

C. Draupadī Kuṛavañci

If we reflect on the first two parts of this chapter, it would appear that whereas the forest Draupadī goes well beyond her traditional epic role to provide a concentration point for a cultically enriched mythology of the Hindu goddess, the disguised Draupadī of the *Virāṭaparvan* remains much closer to the classical epic prototypes and unveils dimensions of the goddess that are in the main already implied in the traditional epic story. Furthermore, whereas in the first setting Draupadī's violent-heroic character is quite explicit, in the second it is only implicit and must be read through the play of the symbols.

There is, however, a Draupadī cult drama that is transitional in these regards. On the one hand, *Turōpatai* Kuṛavañci, or "Draupadī

22. Cf. Villi 4.4.127 and other South Indian vernacular variants in Subramanian 1967, 166–67.

23. A non-pāratīyār "folk" variant (encountered only once in my research) of the Acalammācūran myth (see chap. 5, sec. B) transposes this Kālī theme directly onto Draupadī in her preservation of the Gingee kingdom. According to Kannan Goundar, patron of the expenses for one day at the Mēlaccēri festival, while Pōttu Rāja holds Acalamman's last head, Draupadī drinks the demon's blood lest it touch the ground and a thousand similar demons regenerate.

the Gypsy" (TK),²⁴ is transitional in that it presents a new disguise for Draupadī that can reveal far more fully and explicitly than her old one the violent-heroic aspects that the forest Draupadī has assumed. In these and other "liminal" features, and also for its links with ritual paraphernalia of the Draupadī cult, the play has much in common with "Pōrmaṇṇan's Fight." And although it must be said that the latter is unquestionably the most important non-classical folk play for cultic connections, *Kuravañci* must certainly be ranked next, ahead of the far more rarely performed drama about Muttāl Rāvuttan and the various dramas about Arjuna's additional wives.

Second, *Kuravañci* is also transitional in its setting, which is somewhere between the forest and the period in disguise. It opens with the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī about to enter the kingdom of Virāṭa to begin their year incognito (TK, 8–15). Yet although in her gypsy guise Draupadī hints that the Pāṇḍavas can be found with Virāṭa (ibid., 43), all the action takes place as if they were still based in the forest. The play thus differs slightly from the ballad *Tur-ōpataikuraṁ*, or "Draupadī's Fortune-telling," which on the whole covers the same story. The latter begins in the forest, but by the end Draupadī and the Pāṇḍavas have clearly settled in Virāṭa's kingdom, where they must change from their new disguises back to their old ones (Pukaḷēṇṭippulavar 1909, 64).²⁵ In any case, the setting is fundamentally transitional, involving both an additional forest episode and a folk doubling of the classical disguise theme.

Kuravañci in fact begins, after a sort of résumé of the opening of *Kīcaka Cammāram* (plans for disguises, hiding of weapons in the *Vaṇṇimaram*; TK, 9–15), with an inversion of a scene from *Māṭupīṭi Caṇṭai*. Instead of Bhīṣma saying that the Pāṇḍavas' place of concealment must be a land of plenty, he tells Duryodhana that although the Pāṇḍavas have begun their period of concealment, they are still in a forest where there are no fruits or vegetables and nothing for them to eat. He thus predicts that they will seek some way to get fresh grain (*tiṇai cennel*) to sow in the forest for their food (TK, 20). *Tiṇai* is millet and *cennel* (the text actually has *cennal*) is "red paddy," or paddy that contains red rice after the husk is removed. But in colloquial Tamil, *cennel* refers to all grains, and the connotation is of a variety of fresh seeds.²⁶

24. A shortened version of this play, performed by the Pakkiri-pālaiyam troupe, was observed in January 1982.

25. For a summary of the ballad, see Arunachalam 1976, 167–68, mentioning the forest setting at the beginning.

26. I thank Pon Kothandaraman and N. Deivasundaram for these clarifications.

On Bhīṣma's cue, Duryodhana orders that if anyone comes begging for fresh grain, they should only be given roasted (*varutta cenṇel*), and he prepares to go with his army to search for the Pāṇḍavas from forest to forest (TK, 20–21). Meanwhile, Kṛṣṇa visits the Pāṇḍavas, tells them of Duryodhana's plan, and urges that Draupadī disguise herself as a gypsy fortune-teller (*kuratti = kuravañci, kuṛam*), that is, a member of the low "seventh caste" (*ēḷaṇacāti*; TK, 56) of Kuṛavaṇs (see Thurston 1904, 4: 122–27). She should take Sahadeva on her hip disguised as her child and go to Hāstinapura in Duryodhana's absence to predict the futures of the Kaurava women. As payment she can demand the fresh grain needed for their forest garden, pretending the seeds are for the baby Sahadeva. Draupadī protests: how can she enter Duryodhana's palace without doing up her hair and breaking her vow? But Kṛṣṇa reassures her that the vow can be suspended while she is in disguise. And so she goes to Hāstinapura with her hair up in flowers (a sign of her victory to come), a baby plucked from the audience as Sahadeva on her hip,²⁷ and a diviner's basket (*kurak-kūṭai*) in her right hand (as observed; cf. TK, 22–29).

When she arrives, she finds Duryodhana's mother, Gāndhārī, and his wife, Peruntiruvaḷ, about to play dice (*cokkaṭṭāṇ*). Let us note that Peruntiruvaḷ is represented as a sister of Subhadṛā (TK, 41), an innovation that puts their husbands (Duryodhana and Arjuna) and their sons (Lakṣmaṇa and Abhimanyu) in the same relation to Kṛṣṇa, Subhadṛā's brother. After a series of exchanges, Draupadī convinces them of her credentials and gets Peruntiruvaḷ to promise as much seed as she wants if she proves a satisfactory clairvoyante. She asks for the materials to fashion and worship a cowdung Piḷḷaiyār (or Gaṇeśa), and then tells Peruntiruvaḷ to sit before her basket. Only thus can Draupadī call on Peruntiruvaḷ's "family deities" (*kulateyvaṇkaḷ*) to help her read her future.

Peruntiruvaḷ's family deities are no doubt also Draupadī's, and it is a telling group for her to be associated with: not only Viṣṇu, Śiva, and their consorts, but such village goddesses as Keṅkāpavāṇi (the goddess Gaṅgā dwelling in Śiva's hair), Kālī, Aṅkāḷamman, Ākācavāṇiturkkai (Durgā of the oracular voice), Piṭāriyamman, the

27. The symbolism of Sahadeva as a child has classical precedent; see *Mbh.* 2.70.8 where Kuntī in effect tells Draupadī to replace her as Sahadeva's surrogate mother while all are in the forest, and especially the northern recension passage where Draupadī recalls Kuntī's telling her that she should feed Sahadeva herself (*apud* 4.18.26: *svayaṃ pāñcālī bhojayeh*).

Seven Virgins, and Kollāpurattammāl (TK, 40).²⁸ It is to be noted that although the Kaurava elders acknowledge Draupadī as a Kulateyvam in "Dice Match and Disrobing," the present exchange implies that they actually neglect her: an important theme in village and lineage goddess myths, where neglect of the goddess inevitably prefigures the onset of disaster.²⁹ In effect, Draupadī consolidates her own clairvoyance through the invocation of these "sister" deities, and when the invocation is complete the basket begins to revolve (TK, 39–40).

First the Kuratti tells Peruntiruvāl of her family's past, recalling details of the Kauravas' attempts to kill the Pāṇḍavas and humiliate Draupadī. All this makes Peruntiruvāl happy, so she asks for predictions of the future. But what she hears is a forecast of doom—which we shall return to in a moment—and she falls weeping on the ground. Draupadī demands her cennel, but Gāndhārī challenges her dire predictions and says she will believe them only if the Kuratti can tell the story of Gāndhārī's early life. So Draupadī divulges some intimate details from Gāndhārī's past, most notably her first marriage to a he-goat, and then, in her marriage to the blind king Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the unusual conception of her hundred sons. Upon these disclosures, Gāndhārī weeps too, admitting that both are true.

These details from Gāndhārī's past are, of course, folkloric innovations. Her pregnancy results from embracing a jack tree inhabited by a Rṣi (TK, 47). But most intriguing is the marriage—for which there is a Telugu variant in which her first spouse is a ram (Subba Rao 1976, 270)—to the he-goat.³⁰ When she reached age

28. The identification of Gaṅgā-Keṅkāpavāni comes from my main Terukkūttu informants; cf., however, Roghair 1982, 195, 198 n. 4, 215 n. 17; and Whitehead 1921, 129. Kollāpurattammāl, according to my main dramatist informants, means "the lady who rules the back of the house," and is also named after a village of Kollāpuram (can this be Mahālakṣmī of the Kolhapur in Maharashtra?). The still longer list in the ballad includes most of the above plus the "Three-Eyed Śakti" (Kaṁmūṇṛutaiyacatti), the "Mother of the Green Mountain" (Paccaimalaityāyār), Pāvātirāyaṇ ("Petticoat King," attendant of Ankāḷamman), and numerous others (Pukalēṇṭippulavar 1909, 39). On Pāvātirāyaṇ, who is linked with ritual transvestism and a myth of self-embowelment before the goddess, see Meyer 1984, 81–83, 114–15.

29. See Roghair 1982, 194–99; Whitehead 1921, 126–38; and on a lineage goddess, see the theme of Cellāttā's neglect in Beck, n.d.

30. *Aṭṭukkiṭā(y)*, also the term in the ballad (Pukalēṇṭippulavar 1909, 49), is translated as "he-goat" by Arunachalam (1976, 168); but it can also mean a ram, as in the Andhra variant. The term *kiṭā/kaṭā* suffixed to the more generic term for an animal (e.g., *āṭu*, "goat") has specifically the connotation of a male animal—especially goat, ram, or buffalo—offered in sacrifice. The buffalo offered at the Gingee Fort (see chap. 4, sec. B) is thus an *erumaikkaṭā*, "he-buffalo."

ten, her father's astrologers revealed that whoever first touched her in marriage would die. No prospective bridegrooms were forthcoming until the court ministers devised the following plan: bring in a he-goat, place the *maṅkaliyam* (that is, the marriage badge or *tāli*) into the he-goat's "hand" (*kai taṇilē*), and make the goat put the *tāli* on Gāndhārī. When this was done, the goat's head immediately exploded (*veṭi*) into six pieces (TK, 46).

One cannot miss the sacrificial implications of this "marriage." As if she were a goddess, and indeed as a counterpart to the goddess Draupadī, Gāndhārī receives the offering of a male goat to neutralize her destructive power. What is most interesting, however, is the gesture that accomplishes this offering. In putting the *tāli* around Gāndhārī's neck, the goat dies because he touches her with his "hand." This can be nothing but his right foreleg, and a reminder of the widely diffused South Indian ritual practice in both goat and buffalo sacrifices of placing the right foreleg of the sacrificial victim in the mouth of its severed head, a rite linked in some cases with a mythic explanation that the treatment of the victim in this fashion results from his having formerly violated the goddess by touching her.³¹

It is, of course, Draupadī's predictions and revelations that give her Kuratti disguise its dramatic force. Appearing as an affectionate and auspicious mother, holding Sahadeva to her side, she nonetheless projects the form of a wrathful and vengeful goddess. Moreover, she specifically identifies herself with the various village deities she calls into her basket, and she evokes their cult through her disclosures about Gāndhārī. Indeed, let us note that in such village rites, it is common for a goat sacrifice to precede, or be subordinate to, the greater and more central sacrifice of the water buffalo (see Hildebeitel 1980a, 190–91; 1982b, 86; and below, chap. 17, sec. A). One may thus suspect that the goat sacrifice required by Gāndhārī's first marriage is evoked as a "preliminary rite," anticipatory to the greater sacrifice that will result from her second marriage in which the victims will be her hundred sons, whose deaths are called for by the goddess Draupadī herself. It is, in any case, in this play that Draupadī most fully reveals the "village ritual" dimensions of this second sacrifice when she overwhelms Peruntiruvāḷ and Gāndhārī with revelations of the form her revenge will take:

31. See Hildebeitel 1982b, 89–91; Nanjundayya and Iyer 1928–35, 4: 157–58; Elliot 1860a, 675–81, all concerning variants of the myth of the outraged Brāhmaṇī. The ritual practice, though less common in Tamilnadu than other southern regions, can still be found there (see Whitehead 1921, 51, 93: a goat), and seems to be echoed in other myths as well.

She [Draupadī] went to dwell in the forest, saying, "On the battlefield [paṭukaḷam],³² I will put up my kūntal, which was spread out in the great sabhā."

She went to dwell in the forest, saying, "In the war [uyuttiyam] I will put up my kūntal, which was spread in the sabhā, O mother."

She went, saying, "I, one woman, spread my hair and stood; as a result everyone in the country had to keep their hair spread."

When the battle takes away the army on the eighteenth day, standing on the king of the earth, the Ammaṇ will tie up her kūntal.

Seizing the lord [nāyakaṇaip piṭittu], aiyō, the king who rules the country, standing on your husband [nāyakan],³³ the Ammaṇ will tie up her kūntal.

Taking up a handful of blood, combing her hair, separating his ribs for a comb,

The chaste women [pattiniyal], taking up the fourteen intestines on both sides [? pakkakkutal], gathering up her hair on the paṭukaḷam, the Ammaṇ will tie up her kūntal.

After the differences have vanished [verrumaikaḷ tulainta], Pāñcālī will come, she said, after crushing the decorated crowns of the hundred and one [the Kauravas and Jayadratha, husband of the Kauravas' sister, Duḥśālā].

Having seized and cut off all the heads of her relatives [pankālīs],³⁴ the chaste woman, having put up her hair, will come to rule the earth [pār āḷa varuvāl]. (TK, p. 44)

As far as the chapbook versions of the dramas go, this account of Draupadī's vow is the richest in cultic detail. It is also close to the vow as it is uttered in actual performances of "Dice Match and Disrobing." In a version of the latter recorded by my two main dramatist informants, Draupadī includes not only all of the ritual details just mentioned (paṭukaḷam, standing on Duryodhana, rib-comb, intestines), but adds that Duryodhana's thigh blood will be

32. On this ceremonial "battlefield," see chap. 11, sec. B, and chaps. 15, 18–19.

33. These two verses alternate descriptions of Duryodhana in a way that nicely narrows the focus from the general to the particular: (a) king of the earth (pārmannan); (b) lord, ruler, husband; (c) king who rules the country (nāṭālumannan); (d) lord, ruler husband. On the sexual implications of this stance of Draupadī's on her rival's husband, see sec. A above.

34. "Shareholders": the men in the family she has married into, her male in-laws (see chap. 11, sec. B, and chap. 18, sec. A). These include the hundred Kauravas and Jayadratha.

her hair oil (*eṇṇai*) and his intestines the flower garland tied into her kūntal. Draupadī's play with flowers now achieves one of its grimmest resonances. These two details are also not omitted from "Draupadī the Gypsy": Draupadī mentions them to Kṛṣṇa as part of her vow before she sets off to Hāstinapura (TK, 27). Thus, even though Irāmaccantira Kaviṛāyar's chapbook version of "Dice Match and Disrobing" follows the *Villipāratam* in offering a toned-down version of the vow (see chap. 11, sec. B), the operative version is far closer to what we find in *Turōpatai Kuravañci*.

Let us thus bring our discussion of Draupadī's vow up to date. I have suspended it to this point, not because the vow's violent cultic features are unknown to the performance of "Dice Match and Disrobing," but because they presuppose Draupadī's forest transformations. Indeed, as "Draupadī the Gypsy" is set at the margin of Draupadī's departure from the forest, her vow in "Dice Match and Disrobing" is set at the margin of her forest entry. And so it is recalled in "Draupadī the Gypsy": "She went to dwell in the forest, saying . . ." These links between the vow and the forest are most instructive, for they remind one that the forest Draupadī is herself a multiform of Kālī, the dishevelled goddess linked with inauspiciousness and death, who stands on the corpse of Śiva, devouring and bloody, garlanded with skulls, who dwells in forests and crematoria. These images of Draupadī are ones most readily associated with Draupadī's sister goddess Aṅkāḷamman, who is also a multiform of Kālī and whose cult shares the same core region as Draupadī's. Meyer's informants describe this region, which covers the primary habitat of the Cempaṭavar inland fishermen for whom Aṅkāḷamman is a Kulateyvam, in the most revealing terms: it extends "as far as Aṅkāḷamman's hair is spread" (1984, 101). It is Aṅkāḷamman who is known as *kuṭalpiṭuriki māriyāyi*, "Māri [Māriyamman] who grasps the intestines,"³⁵ and whose crematorium ceremonies sometimes feature a rite called *kuṭal piṭuriki mālai*, "pulling out the intestines and wearing them as a garland" (ibid., 114, 131, and passim). It is thus not surprising that Aṅkāḷamman and her attendant Pāvāṭairāyan, the "Petticoat King" (see n. 28), are explicitly called forth into Draupadī's fortune-teller basket.

But most important, one of the myths that accounts for Aṅkāḷamman's crematorium rituals has her take the guise of a Kuṛatti to predict the deaths of the king and queen (see chap. 16, sec. B) and the destruction of the fort of the city she has entered.

35. This information comes from the chief trustee at the Aṅkālaparameśvari Kōyil, Mundakanniyamman Koyil Street, Mylapore, Madras.

Further, when she finally agrees to serve the queen as midwife, she disguises herself again as an aged woman with a newborn baby, her son Virabhadra (Meyer 1984, 12–14). Here we have an ominous parallel to Draupadī's appearance with her own "child of the forest," Sahadeva, on her hip. We shall look more closely at this *Ankālammaṇ* myth in chapter 16, where we will see that it unveils a number of thematic and structural continuities between "Draupadī the Gypsy" and "Pōrmaṇṇa's Fight." For the moment, however, it is enough to note that *Ankālammaṇ*'s *Kuṛatti* disguise is not only known in her cult in Tamilnadu, but has a variant in her Telugu mythology from Palnad District, Andhra Pradesh. There *Ankālamma* (Telugu spelling) disguises herself as a fortune-teller to trick the Śaivite kings of Kalyāṇ, who neglect her worship, into sacrificing to her (Roghair 1982, 197–98). In effect, in the two Tamil myths, instead of converting the kings into sacrificers to the goddess, the *Kuṛatti*—whether Draupadī or *Ankālammaṇ*—foretells their futures as her sacrificial victims.

But let us return to the conclusion of "Draupadī the Gypsy." Duryodhana comes back empty-handed from his forest search, learns of the *Kuṛatti*'s predictions, questions her himself, hears more of the same, and, growing suspicious that she is Draupadī, orders her jailed. Kṛṣṇa hears her prayers and tells Arjuna to go to Hāstinapura dressed as a *Kuṛavaṇ*, a male member of the *Kuṛatti*'s caste, to recover Draupadī. At Hāstinapura Duryodhana soon hears about the *Kuṛavaṇ*'s insults and boasts, and, suspecting that it is Arjuna, orders his servants to fight the *Kuṛavaṇ* to determine whether he bears Arjuna's give-away trait: the "fish mark on his right side" (TK, 58–59; see chap. 9, n. 36). But when Bhīṣma warns that Arjuna could destroy the whole kingdom, Duryodhana decides not to arrest him and releases Draupadī to him. The two then return to the forest with the *Kuṛatti*'s payment in grain. This brings us to the last and most decisive of the play's cult-based themes, and it is significant that the drama is closer to the cult than the ballad, which does not have this ending.

When Draupadī and Arjuna return, Kṛṣṇa tells them the *cennel* is roasted, not fresh. But he will seed it anyway. Arjuna doesn't doubt Kṛṣṇa's power to make it grow, but asks how he will do it. Kṛṣṇa replies:

Listen, sister's husband [*maittuṇā*]. If you ask how the roasted *cennel* will grow, the blackened ones will become crowlike [*kākkai cōlam*, a kind of millet], the black grains will become *uḷuntu* [black gram], the burnt ones will become *maṇakkam*

[another millet], the cooked ones will become *centinai* [red millet], and the ones that have grown black will become *karuntinai* [black millet]. Since we have sown them in nine kinds like this, we give them the name *navatāṇiyam* ["nine grains"]. They will grow in three months in a way that is pleasing to the nine planets [*navakkirakanīka*]. (TK, 64)

And so the roasted grains grow, to the amazement of Duryodhana.³⁶ Meanwhile the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī-amman—as she is called in this finale—settle themselves in the kingdom of Matsya.

The ceremony of the nine grains (Sanskrit *navadhānya*), an important subrite at Draupadī festivals, is thus given a mythical origin in this play. One should note that the structure of the drama is like that of numerous Brāhmaṇa and classical myths in which the gods and demons (like the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas) contest with each other for elements of the sacrifice. Not uncharacteristically, it is Kṛṣṇa who (like Viṣṇu in the classical mythology) determines the outcome. He does the miraculous seeding, but the securing of the nine grains—one should say, the nine blackened and barren grains—is achieved by Draupadī. In other words—a point worth retaining—Kṛṣṇa and Draupadī collaborate in a scene of death and revival. For in effect, it may be said that the Navadhānya represents the principle of rebirth and immortality at the heart of the symbolic sacrifices performed at Draupadī's festivals. It is thus no coincidence that Kṛṣṇa should send Draupadī to trick the demon-born Kauravas into yielding it to the Pāṇḍavas before they enter the kingdom of Matsya, the Fish, the "womb" of their regeneration.

36. A similar episode in the *Elder Brothers Story* has surely the same ritual background: the twin heroes' mother and father receive roasted seeds from the latter's parallel cousins (*parikāḷis*), and by Viṣṇu's grace the roasted seeds sprout. They are not said to be the "nine grains," but they grow on barren ground to contain nine kinds of gems (see Beck, n.d., 59–66).

14 Kṛṣṇa the Messenger

Of the plays I have not seen, whether whole or in part, *Kirukṣṇa Tūtu*, or “Kṛṣṇa the Messenger,” has the highest occurrence of festival performance (see table 6).¹ It was regarded by my two main Terukkūttu informants as one of their most popular plays. And even from the chapbook text (1979; henceforth *KT*), one can easily glimpse the main reason for its appeal. It highlights Kṛṣṇa in one of his most famous, complex, and colorful undertakings: his war-inducing peace initiative to the Kaurava court in the humble role of the Pāṇḍavas’ messenger or ambassador (*tūtu*; cf. Sanskrit *dūta*). The Tamil tradition emphasizes that this is one of many instances when Kṛṣṇa lowers himself to serve his devotees: a prominent bhakti theme.² But such a “lowering of the divine” is already evident in the bhakti overtones of the *Mahābhārata*’s handling of the same episodes (see Hildebeitel 1976a, 123).

As I indicated in *The Ritual of Battle* (103–40), Kṛṣṇa’s embassy, along with the other incidents in the *Udyogaparvan* that frame it, marks the onset of his full involvement in the *Mahābhārata*. He is catalyst and schemer, interacting through the course of this parvan with almost every major character on both sides of the war to come, and setting the conditions for their participation in it. The build-up to the war is thus the setting for a series of stark disclosures that the battlefield of Kurukṣetra will be the scene of Kṛṣṇa’s true business on earth. Through all this, Kṛṣṇa shows his most devious side, one that the Tamil epic tradition intensifies and develops

1. I had arranged for it to be done as one of the twelve plays in four nights at Pakkiriṇālayam in January 1982. But I was told upon arrival that I could not appreciate the *Mahābhārata* Terukkūttu cycle without seeing “Kṛṣṇa’s Water Sports” and “Rājasūya.” As those two plays also highlight Kṛṣṇa, it was decided to drop “Kṛṣṇa the Messenger.”

2. See Venkatesa Acharya 1981 (in Śrī Vaiṣṇava contest), and cf. below n. 10 and chap. 12, n. 9.

further. But it is in connection with the *Udyogaparvan* that one also becomes aware of the historical depth of the Tamil epic tradition, for it is this parvan that marks the beginning of the surviving portion of the ninth-century *Pārata Venpā* of Peruntēvaṇār (see above, chap. 2, and Venkatesa Acharya 1981, 57–64). As Venkatesa Acharya repeatedly observes in his illuminating study, the *Pārata Venpā* provides the oldest surviving literary source for the incorporation of a number of folk themes into the Tamil *Mahābhārata* tradition (ibid., 97–98, 113, 119, 123–24). As these have been faithfully preserved by Villiputtūr (ibid., 81, 105), most of them have come down more or less intact into the Terukkūttu. Not the least of these is Aravāṇ's sacrifice, a distinctly Tamil *Udyogaparvan* episode that we shall turn to in our next chapter.

As there is no need to follow in detail the full course of Kṛṣṇa's labyrinthine interactions in *Kirūṣṇaṇ Tūtu*, or all their Tamil folkloric enrichments, I will limit discussion to those incidents that relate most centrally to the play's Draupadī cult setting.

Before Kṛṣṇa sets off on his embassy, there is in all accounts an exchange with the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī in which he asks their views on what he should say. The dialogue in the play provides some interesting precisions on classical themes. Draupadī, as one would expect, reminds Kṛṣṇa that she not only awaits revenge for her molestation (as in *Mbh.* 5.80.33–39), but the fulfillment of her vow to rebraid her hair (*KT*, 17).³ Dharma then restates most clearly a mythic correlation that the *Mahābhārata* makes more allusively (see Hiltebeitel 1976a, 128–40): that as Kṛṣṇa (Viṣṇu) once went in his Vāmana, or dwarf, form to the demon Bali and measured from earth to heaven with his three steps, so now with the same legs he should go to Duryodhana (*KT*, 19). In the same vein, Pampa in his Kannada *Bhāratam* has Kṛṣṇa assume his Trivikrama form—in which the dwarf magnifies himself to traverse the universe with his three steps—once the Kauravas assault him within their court (Sitaramiah 1967, 119).

There is also, however, a change in the way these dialogues are presented. In the Sanskrit epic, Kṛṣṇa seems to inspire a curious reversal of attitudes: the wrathful Bhīma urges peaceful diplomacy (5.72.1–10), whereas the usually calm Sahadeva urges the provocation of war (5.79.1–4). In the Tamil tradition, beginning at least with Peruntēvaṇār, this inversion is dropped. Bhīma cries out unabashedly for war (Venkatesa Acharya 1981, 96–97, citing *Pārata*

3. Before Kṛṣṇa's arrival, she reminds her husbands how, by being rolled on the ground, "my kūntal has become dust" (*puḷutipattēṇ kūntal*; *KT*, 11).

Veṅṇā 120; Villi 5.4.19–20; *KT*, 20). But Sahadeva's call for war seems to have become the basis for a remarkable assertion not only of the war's inevitability, but of Kṛṣṇa's determination to provoke it.

Developing this theme from Peruntēvaṇār (see Venkatesa Acharya 1981, 97–98), Villi thus has Sahadeva say ironically that it does not matter whether Duryodhana keeps the land or returns it, or whether Draupadī reties her hair with flowers or leaves it loose, for he knows that the war will only go as Kṛṣṇa intends it to (5.4.31). When he continues in this vein, and Kṛṣṇa takes him aside and asks darkly whether the war can be prevented at all, Sahadeva replies that Kṛṣṇa has been born to alleviate the Earth's burden through this war (cf. chap. 11, n. 9); thus only *he* can prevent it. And this he can do only under the most unthinkable conditions: "First, killing Arjuna, so that Karṇa who hates him rules the earth, [then] shaving off [or tying up] the black bundle of hair of the lady who has *aṇaṅku* [Draupadī]; [and] if I tie you also in person, binding your legs, catching you by your hands, [only then] can we keep this *Mahābhārata* war from happening" (Villi 5.4.35).

V. S. Rajam has shown that amid its "broad spectrum" of meanings in earlier Tamil literature, *aṇaṅku* is used for women who "afflict" or "cause distress" by their sexuality. It may also serve metonymically to refer to certain "entities" (women and deities included) "as *aṇaṅkus* by virtue of having the *aṇaṅku* quality and causing an *aṇaṅku* effect in their perceivers or experiencers" (1986, 260, and *passim*). Villi uses the term elsewhere in this second sense.⁴ In the present passage, however, it underscores Draupadī's ominous, threatening aspects as the dishevelled woman whose power to "afflict" has erupted with the violation of her chastity.⁵ It is also worth noting that Sahadeva links the outcome of Kurukṣetra entirely to the destinies of Arjuna, Draupadī, and Kṛṣṇa: only by the virtual elimination of this threesome—in effect, the divine triad of the Draupadī cult (if not of the *Mahābhārata*)⁶—can the war be averted.

4. On the bad omens that follow the utterances of Draupadī and the Pāṇḍavas' vows, see Villi 2.2.259, where it is said that such signs occur "when a woman like Aṇaṅku weeps" (*aṇaṅku aṇaiyāl aluṭa pōṭē*). Here, according to David Shulman (personal communication), one has the medieval Tamil usage of Aṇaṅku as a name for the goddess (i.e., Durgā/Śrī).

5. Let us retain the link between *aṇaṅku* and chastity suggested by Rajam: "an awesome touch to a resolute wife's character, . . . not dangerous sacred power" (1986, 265). She is criticizing Hart's claim (1973, 1975) that chastity as marital fidelity was the source of *aṇaṅku*.

6. In Draupadī temples, it is common to find Draupadī icons (not only processional icons but images in the cella and on the temple gateway) flanked by icons of Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa; on this triad in the *Mahābhārata*, see Hildebeitel 1985b.

As to the strange stipulation concerning Draupadī's hair, there is an uncertainty whether the verb in question, *kaḷaintu*, means "remove, shave off" or "tie up." The conventional meaning is certainly "shave" or "remove." But C. Jagannathachariar directed me to an ancient passage, mentioned in the *Tamil Lexicon* for its unusual usage of this verb, that provides an exact parallel and supports the translation "tie up," which he favors. In *Purapporuḷ Venṇāmālai* 9.21 a hero refuses to bind up his tuft of hair (*kuṭumi kaḷaintān en kō*) unless he conquers a fort by sundown. In the sense of "shave off," Draupadī would seem to be projected as a widow, for whom shaving the hair is a traditional though controversial practice.⁷ And in the sense of "tie up," one assumes this must mean a premature tying of her hair, one that would prevent her—as would shaving—from fulfilling her vow. In any case, the Terukkūttu chapbook goes with the startling, and no doubt most ominous and inauspicious, meaning of "shave" (*caravam ceytuviṭṭu*; KT, 23). It is also noteworthy that although the drama mentions the shaving of Draupadī's hair and the binding of Kṛṣṇa, which is important in what follows, it omits any reference to the slaying of Arjuna.

The upshot of all this is a vivid bhakti tableau, traceable from Peruntēvaṇār through Villiputtūr to our drama, in which Kṛṣṇa asks how Sahadeva could possibly bind him, and Sahadeva replies, in the words of the play, that he can do so through the "rope of knowledge" (*ñāṇakkayīru*), or the "long rope of his mind [or heart]" (*neṭumaṇak kayīru*; KT, 25; cf. Venkatesa Acarya 1981, 97–98; Villi 5.4.36–39). According to my main dramatist informants, Sahadeva's binding and subsequent release of Kṛṣṇa are among the favorite scenes of the Terukkūttu. It now would seem likely that the Tamil tradition has transferred the theme of the binding of Kṛṣṇa from one context to another. In the Sanskrit epic, Kṛṣṇa is provoked to reveal his awesome divine form in the Kaurava court when Duryodhana and his cohorts conspire to bind him—an act that Dhṛtarāṣṭra compares to grasping for the moon (*Mbh.* 5.128.39; see Hiltebeitel 1976a, 123). In the Tamil tradition, this theophany, now called Viśvarūpa or "Universal Form" like Kṛṣṇa's other manifestation in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, is provoked not by any attempt to bind him, but by the Kauravas' construction of an elaborate throne for Kṛṣṇa that will spill him into an underground pit filled with murderous warriors, whom Kṛṣṇa will then kill while assuming his

7. South Indian women, however, also commonly shave their heads in connection with pilgrimage vows.

Viśvarūpa transformation.⁸ Thus, whereas the Sanskrit epic links the binding and the theophany together, the Tamil tradition splits them, and through this split achieves two things. First, it heightens the destructive dimensions of the Viśvarūpa (it is not linked immediately with any killings in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, though of course it foreshadows Kṛṣṇa's more fully destructive form in the *Gītā*; see Hildebeitel 1976a, 115–28). And second, it intensifies the bhakti overtones of the binding theme: it is not that it is impossible to bind the Lord, but that the Lord submits himself to be bound by the human heart.

The second incident we must spotlight in this play comes toward the end of Kṛṣṇa's visit and is the penultimate scene of the chapbook version. After his "peace" mission has aborted, Kṛṣṇa sets up a meeting between Kuntī and Karṇa in which Kuntī is to reveal that she is Karṇa's mother and request him to use his most deadly weapon, the Nāgāstra ("snake weapon"), only once against her other sons, the Pāṇḍavas. Here the classical Tamil tradition has introduced two conditions that Karṇa requires of Kuntī in this pact.

First, because so many women have claimed to be his mother, the gods have given him a saree that will incinerate any woman who wears it after making a false maternal claim. He warns that other women have put it on only to be reduced to skeletons. Undaunted, Kuntī dons the combustible saree, becomes radiant as gold, and Karṇa believes her (Venkatesa Acharya 1981, 123–24, citing *Pārata Venpā* 308–11; cf. Villi 5.4.250–53). One may suspect that this golden Kuntī—who is also known as Pṛthā, linked with *pṛthivī*, "earth"—evokes the "golden earth (*kañcanabhūmi*) of classical Indian cosmologies. Then, having agreed to use his Nāgāstra only once against the Pāṇḍavas, Karṇa elicits Kuntī's promise that when he lies dying on the battlefield, she will take him on her lap, feed him with milk from her breast, and proclaim him before all as her son (Venkatesa Acharya 1981, 128, citing *Pārata Venpā* 335; cf. Villi 5.4.26–61). Curiously the chapbook drama alters these incidents. There is no combustible saree test. And rather than reserving the fulfillment of the breast-milk promise for the battlefield, it replaces the saree here as the test of Kuntī's motherhood.⁹ If milk comes to her breasts out of maternal affection, says Karṇa, he will

8. Cf. Venkatesa Acharya 1981, 109–12; Villi 5.4.178–216 (summarized in Subramanian 1967, 194–95; *KT*, 51–57 (in taking the Viśvarūpa, Kṛṣṇa puts one leg inside the pit and kills everyone there [56])).

9. In the drama dealing with Karṇa's death, Kuntī does not offer her milk to him on the battlefield (see chap. 18, sec. B).

know that she is his mother from drinking it. Immediately the milk comes forth, and Kuntī puts it in a gold cup before Karna. But Kṛṣṇa takes the form of a cat and spills it, much to Kuntī and Karna's distress (KT, 66).¹⁰

Unfortunately, I have made no inquiries into whether the test of the saree is included in performance versions of *Kīrṣṇaṇ Tūtu*, or for that matter whether it is ever narrated or commented upon by the pāratīyārs. That Villi includes it, however, makes it likely that it cannot entirely have escaped notice in the Draupadī cult. Still, one must wonder what folk concepts and possible practices lie behind the introduction of this theme into the epic story. Venkatesa Acharya points out that in the Jaina *Nemināthapurāṇa*, a work in Kannaḍa, Karna gets the "testing garment" from Jvālamālīnī, the female attendant of the Tirthaṅkara Candraprabhā. He further notes that a cult of Jvālamālīnī ("Flame Garland") was promulgated at Poṇṇūr (Wandiwash Taluk, North Arcot) as early—he thinks—as the eighth century (1981, 124, 257–58). Poṇṇūr is presently the site of a thriving Draupadī temple (see map 2, tables 2 and 6).

We have had a number of occasions to notice Kuntī's importance in the Draupadī cult. So even though we have no record that the combustible saree is part of her Draupadī cult folklore, it is worth remarking on its potential cultic significance. One will recall from chapter 9 that Kṛṣṇa takes the form of a rat to sever Karna's bow before he can win Draupadī as his bride.¹¹ In that scene, and also in this one, where he becomes a cat to keep Karna from drinking Kuntī's milk, there is a suggestion that Kṛṣṇa's role is to keep Karna from close feminine contact. As the son of the sun god, Sūrya, Karna inherits a dangerous solar side that complicates his relations with women. It could well be this symbolism that also lies behind the fiery saree. Only his true mother can wear it, for she, having conceived him through the rays of the sun, must in some sense be fire resistant. This, of course, brings Kuntī close to Draupadī, who presumably could also "handle" Karna, having been born from fire. Indeed, Draupadī cult folklore sometimes invests Drau-

10. David Shulman's suggestion (personal communication) is too delightful and insightful to pass up here: Kṛṣṇa as a cat provides a "hint" of the "cat hold doctrine" of the Teṅkalai Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition, God being like a cat who saves his devotees without any effort on their part. Shulman notes further that Kṛṣṇa is "usually depicted in Thanjavur painting with a small cat somewhere at the bottom of the picture."

11. There is also a Pāratīyār's variant, recorded by Shideler (1987, 183), in which Kṛṣṇa becomes an insect to cover the hole that Karna must penetrate to hit the fish target.

padī as well with an incombustible saree, visible only to the eyes of devotion, which she drapes over the coals to protect the feet of her firewalking devotees (see chap. 19). But the important point for now is that the relation between Draupadī and Karna is different from that between Karna and Kuntī. For while the one is tinged with unfulfillable maternal and filial yearnings, the other is marked by unrealizable sexual longings that are echoed in the “sixth man” theme that surfaces repeatedly in folklore about Draupadī, whether she longs for Karna or for Kṛṣṇa.¹² As regards Karna, it is my contention that his complications with women evoke an image of the Pralaya: the portentuous possibility of a union between the sun and the earth. As I have argued elsewhere (see Hildebeitel 1980b), it is fitting that it should be Kṛṣṇa’s role as *avatāra* to keep this potentially destructive son of the Sun and the heroines who represent the Earth apart.

12. See above, chap. 13, sec. A (in both the nelli fruit episode and the Andhra story of Draupadī’s sexual voracity), and Hildebeitel 1976a, 64 (in a Buddhist Jātaka). There is also a popular Tamil short story—T. M. C. Ragunathan’s “*Venṛilan Enṛapōtum*” in his collection of stories *Rākunātaṅ Kataikaḷ* (1953)—in which, before Draupadī reveals her longings for Karna, she tells Kṛṣṇa how she feels about her husbands: “When I am in Dharma’s embrace, he stops to preach about dharma! Bhīma—he is too much for a delicate woman like me. I feel like a piece of meat! Arjuna, he is as close as one comes to my ideal. And the twins, I should take them on my lap!” (paraphrasing K. Kailasapathy’s personal communication). On the childishness of the twins, see chap. 13, n. 27.

15

Aravān's Sacrifice

If folk practices and concepts have repeatedly influenced the formation of the classical Tāmil versions of the *Mahābhārata*, they have not done so anywhere more decisively than in the story of Aravān's sacrifice. The Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* knows nothing of this episode. In the Sanskrit text, as we shall see, instead of offering himself in a prewar sacrifice to the goddess, Aravān is killed in battle, on the war's eighth day. Other parts of India know similar folk stories about other epic figures. Telugu traditions introduce Barbareeka, a new son of Bhīma and Hiḍimbā's son Ghaṭotkaca, as the subject of a variant prewar sacrifice to Kālī. Kṛṣṇa grants that the hero's severed head will be able to see the eighteen-day war from a mountain top (Subba Rao 1976, 272–73). Cunningham also supplies a North Indian variant about the epic hero Bhuriśravas from the local folklore of Kurukṣetra. Having seen Bhuriśravas' invincibility as an archer, Kṛṣṇa disguises himself as a Brahman and requests Bhuriśravas' head: "The archer consented, but with the condition that his head should be placed on the pinnacle of Kṛṣṇa's chariot, so that he might behold the fight which he had come purposely to see. His head was cut off at once and placed on the pinnacle of the chariot, and the Pāṇḍavas were at once victorious" (1970, 99).¹

1. The folklore of a prewar sacrifice also shapes a Nepalese tradition, connected with the royal Indra Jatra festival in which the ancient Nepalese king Yalambar is worshipped beheaded as a "great blue mask of Akash Bhairab [Bhairava] whose eyes are turned 'for ever skyward' ": "Yalambar journeyed to India to witness the epic Mahabharata war disguised as the great Lord Siva in his terrifying Bhairab form. At the battle site Lord Krishna, knowing full well that Yalambar would certainly join Krishna's forces, none the less asked him on which side he intended to fight. When Yalambar or Bhairab ambiguously replied that he would fight on the losing side, Krishna chopped off his head with such violence that it soared through the sky and landed in the Kathmandu Valley" (Anderson 1971, 128). Here Bhairava is a head like Aravān rather than the holder of one like Pōttu Rāja (see chaps. 17–19).

But Aravān's sacrifice is found only in the Tamil epic tradition. There it has kept its main contours from its rich development by Peruntēvaṇār, who provides the earliest version known, to the retellings of Villiputtūr and Nallāppillai.² Moreover, the story in its Tamil forms is also clearly related to a traditional South Indian glorification and apparent practice of heroic self-mutilation—in some cases suggesting self-decapitation—before the goddess, usually for the sake of victory in battle.

A. The Head Offering to the Goddess in Pallava and Chola Sculptures

Head offerings are first referred to in the *Cilappatikāram*, where the forest warrior Maṛavars are exhorted to cut their necks for Korṛavai. As the goddess of Victory in the early Tamil classics, Korṛavai is already assimilated to Durgā in this text (see Hart 1975, 23; Dikshitar 1939, 181, 187; Harle 1963, 243). But it is the sculptured depictions of such scenes that are most revealing. Found in Pallava and Chola temples—including the Draupadī Ratha at Mahabalipuram and the Singavaram Raṅganātha temple near Gingee—they display a recurrent configuration. Flanking Durgā-Mahiṣāsūramardīnī, who stands on the Buffalo Demon's severed head, are two kneeling suppliants.³ The one to her right is usually shown holding a tuft of his hair with his left hand while pressing a sword to his neck with his right. But at Singavaram, in a less drastic pose (Srinivasan 1964, 115), he pierces his left palm with a dagger. In any case, the figure to the right is consistently the one making the most dramatic gesture. In contrast, the left figure usually raises his joined palms in adoration. But at the Chola-period Puḷlamaṅkai Śiva temple near Thanjavur, this figure cuts a piece of flesh from his right thigh (Vogel 1930–32, 541).

Finding no “myth or Purāṇa story about Durgā” that would explain these configurations, Harle (1963, 240, 245) proposes that they depict the Maṛavars' blood-letting practices referred to in the *Cilappatikāram*. But the passages describing the Maṛavar rites them-

2. See Venkatesa Acharya 1981, 137–44 (on *Pārata Venpā* 414ff., noting its absence from the Telugu *Mahābhārata*); Subramanian 1967, 210 (on Villi 5.6–7, noting its absence from Kannada or Malayalam versions of the epic); cf. Nallāppillai *Makā-pāratam* 5.4 and its prose elaboration in Caṇmukakkavīrāyar 1969, vol. 2, *Uttiyōka Parvam*, pp. 198–214.

3. I take some liberties here in straightway identifying the principals here as Durgā and Mahiṣa (cf. Bosch 1956). As we shall see, such self-offerings may also be made to Kālī, though presumably without her standing on a buffalo head. My main justification follows below, where I link the configuration to the *Devī Māhātmyam*.

selves already make reference to the goddess as Mahiṣāsuramardinī. It is further unlikely that the Maṛavars should provide the prototypes for the iconography of Brahmanical temples. What Harle and others seem to have missed, however, is the scene at the end of the *Devī Māhātmyam*, where the dispossessed king Suratha and the impoverished Vaiśya Samādhi, who have heard the recitation of Devī's great deeds, close the account by offering "sacrifice sprinkled with blood from their own limbs" (*balim . . . nijagātrāsrugukṣitam*) before an image of the goddess (Jagadisvarananda 1972, 163; *Devī Māhātmyam* 13.10–11). This purāṇic scene likely provides the prototype for the two figures flanking the goddess: the king, a Kṣatriya, undergoing the sacrificial rite, and the Vaiśya the simply pious one. But it is noteworthy that in the one case where the left figure does engage in blood-letting, it is from his thigh, the source of the Vaiśya caste in the Vedic *Puruṣa Sūkta*.

For present purposes, several matters are most significant. First, if I am right about the identification of the two figures on either side of the goddess, we have strong evidence that it is the *Devī Māhātmyam* that provides the prototype for such early South Indian representations of the goddess and the buffalo. If this is so, it provides a point of reference for the transformations the mythology of the Buffalo Demon has undergone in Toṇṭaimaṇṭalam, the core area of the Draupadī cult. One should also note that no matter what goddess receives the offerings, they are linked to the worship of Durgā as slayer of the Buffalo Demon and presiding goddess of the ceremonies of Navarātra. As we shall see, the dramas that portray Aravān's sacrifice to Kālī refer to such a setting. Also, whatever the sacrificial gesture depicted in the panels, it would appear that self-decapitation (whether real or symbolic) combines with other forms of blood-letting—from the neck, the palm, the thigh, or elsewhere—that may either provide substitutes for the surpeme offering or be connected with a comprehensive sequence of ritual self-mutilations. A rite of this latter kind is alluded to in a late Pallava inscription on a slab from Gudur Taluk, Nellore District, that describes a kneeling self-decapitated figure with head in one hand and his sword in the other. This depiction is closest to Aravān's sacrifice: after first offering *navakaṇṭam*—that is, flesh from nine parts of the body—the hero at last severs his head as a final offering and places it on the goddess's altar (see Srinivasan 1960, 29–30; Harle 1963, 243).

It cannot be seriously doubted that Aravān's sacrifice to Kālī at the beginning of Tamil versions of the *Mahābhārata* war results from an incorporation of such ritual themes into the classical Tamil epic tradition. Moreover, the popularity of Aravān as a deity with his

own cult, in which he is commonly called Kūttāṇṭavar, is an added indication of his deep Tamil roots. In fact, this Aravāṇ-Kūttāṇṭavar cult may well be older than the Draupadī cult and was almost certainly originally independent of it, as it still largely is today. But these are matters best reserved for discussion of the rituals associated with Aravāṇ in these two "*Mahābhārata* cults," which goes beyond the scope of this work. Here it will be enough to tell his story, primarily as it is presented in the Terukkūttu dramas that are performed at Draupadī festivals, and sometimes at his own Kūttāṇṭavar festivals as well.⁴

First, however, one must reckon with the slender basis the Sanskrit epic seems to have provided for his flowering. His Sanskrit name, Irāvānt or Irāvan, has been plausibly derived from *idā-vant*, "he who possessed the *idā*." The *idā*, says Biardeau, "is the part of the oblatory substance 'consumed in common by the participants,' from which comes all the fecundity of the sacrifice. Irāvāṇ is by vocation the sacrificial victim."⁵ A learned Tamil mythologization of the *idā* in the person of Aravāṇ (Villiputtūr still calls him Irāvāṇ), in the context of a competition over who sacrifices the "possessor of the *idā*," is not inconceivable. The Pāṇḍavas will wrest Aravāṇ, the exemplary oblation, from the Kauravas in much the same fashion as we have seen them obtain the *navadhānya* from the Kauravas in "Draupadī the Gypsy." Moreover, the *idā* is one of those substances that the Devas and Asuras vie for in the "archetypal" agonistic mythology of the Brāhmaṇas (Lévi 1966, 117–18; cf. Shulman 1980a, 128).

For contemporary followers of the Draupadī and Kūttāṇṭavar cults, however, this etymology for Aravāṇ's name is certainly quite unknown. Invariably, the name is straightforwardly derived from Tamil *aravu*, "snake."

B. Aravāṇ's Battlefield Sacrifice

The opening scene of *Aravāṇ Kaṭapali Nāṭakam* (1977; henceforth AK) is Duryodhana's court.⁶ Śakuni tells Duryodhana he should

4. My two main Terukkūttu informants mentioned several Kūttāṇṭavar temples where they had performed, and Whitehead (1921, 27) even mentions Kūttāṇṭavar as "the god of the actors or dancers," a claim that was denied by my informants and of which I could find no trace elsewhere. But there was no Terukkūttu—only recitation of *Pāratam*—at most of the Kūttāṇṭavar festivals I studied.

5. Biardeau and Malamoud 1976, 143–44, quoting Renou 1953, s.v. *idā*; cf. Biardeau CR 89, 222–23; Biardeau and Peterfalvi 1985, 187; Heesterman 1985, 60–69; and Gonda 1965, 91: Indra's elephant Airāvata, from *irāvat*, "the nourishing raincloud."

6. An abridged version of this play was observed at Pakkiriṭṭalaiyām in January 1982. The sequel play on Aravāṇ (Pūvaṇ, n.d.; henceforth AAC) was never seen in performance.

perform *kaṭapali* (more correctly *kaḷappali*), a battlefield (*kaḷam*) sacrifice (*pali*) to Kālī to guarantee victory. Let us note that we have met the word *kaḷam* already in the term *paṭukaḷam*, "battlefield" or "place of lying down." In both compounds, the semantic range of *kaḷam* as "open space, threshing floor, assembly, hall of sacrifice, battlefield" (*Tamil Lexicon*, s.v.) should not be forgotten.

In response to Sakuni, Bhīṣma says Aravān is the most suitable victim for the *kaḷappali*, and he recommends that Duryodhana ask Sahadeva—whom the Tamil tradition regards as a great astrologer—the ideal time for the offering. Faithful to the integrity of his astrological profession, Sahadeva tells Duryodhana that the correct time for the sacrifice is midnight of the *amāvācai* (new moon night; Sanskrit *amāvāsyā*). If he performs it then, it will spell certain victory. Duryodhana then obtains Aravān's agreement to come secretly to the battlefield to be sacrificed the following night, and leaves. Throughout all this, the youthful Aravān is very noble and dutiful, considering himself fortunate to be able to sacrifice himself for Duryodhana, who as his true father's parallel cousin is his own classificatory "father" as well. But Aravān leaves a loophole: he will come the next night for the *kaḷappali* only if no harm comes before that to his life (*uyir*), his body, or his thirty-two bodily parts (AK, 7–31).

In the Pāṇḍavas' camp, Kṛṣṇa now takes matters in hand. Aware of Duryodhana's plan, he urges the Pāṇḍavas to perform *kaḷappali* first. But only slowly does he reveal how it must be done and who must be the victim: It will be performed to Kālī, or more exactly, to Vīramāṅkāli, the "Great Kālī of Heroes," as part of the *āyudhapūjā* (AK, 14, 40), the ceremonial blessing of weapons that occurs traditionally as a subrite during Dasarā festivals, where it is connected with the opening of military campaigns at the end of the rainy season, and more specifically, with the opening of the armory (see note by Krishnaswami Aiyangar in Richards 1910, 30).

In this connection, Dharma's first innocent question about the victim is full of significance: "O listen, Swami, Lord of the World, shouldn't we first offer sacrifice of a wild buffalo [*kāṭṭerumai*], elephant, boar, horse, camel, sheep, cock, or deer for the *Āyudhapūjā*?" (AK, 40). The buffalo is of course the normal victim associated with royal Dasarā ceremonies. But when Kṛṣṇa now explains what he has in mind, he suggests that the human offering entails, or is the culmination of, all such animal offerings. The victim, he says, should be handsome, truthful, observant of customs, and, more interestingly, *etirrōman*, one whose hair stands on end. The classical Tamil renditions of Aravān's sacrifice do not mention this last detail. My two main dramatist informants explain that the

condition of *etirrōmaṇ* occurs when people are startled, and it refers here to the victim's capacity to feel awe before sacrificing himself to the goddess. One is reminded of Arjuna's horripilation on seeing Kṛṣṇa's theophany in the *Bhagavad Gītā*. An intriguing popular understanding of this trait seems to confirm Aravāṇ's affinities with animal victims. According to a local temple official at Tindivanam, it was Draupadī who wanted Aravāṇ sacrificed because he was "too hairy." Again, man and beast seem to come together. One may suspect a connection between the thrill of the "hairy" self-sacrificing Aravāṇ and the frequently cited requirement in South Indian animal sacrifices that the victim must shiver, after being doused with water, before it can be beheaded (see, e.g., Oppert 1893, 460).

Having now realized that Kṛṣṇa is calling for a human victim, Dharma, still naive, asks how this can be: "Is it a thing to be purchased?" Kṛṣṇa replies that there are only four suitable candidates: Śalya, who has sided with Duryodhana; Arjuna, whom the Pāṇḍavas cannot lose or they will perish; Aravāṇ, "who doesn't belong to us"; and Kṛṣṇa himself. All other possibilities eliminated, Kṛṣṇa offers to be the victim. Horrified, Dharma says he would rather return to the forest. Then Aravāṇ steps forth, chides Dharma for his vacillation, and says that as he is obviously the victim Dharma would prefer, he would agree to perform the *Kaḷappali* for the Pāṇḍavas were it not that he had already promised the same to Duryodhana. From this point on Dharma never again demurs. Instead, he congratulates Aravāṇ's courageous dedication to his "father" Duryodhana, and leaves it to Kṛṣṇa to work out the details so that Aravāṇ's *Kaḷappali* will be performed for the right side (AK, 41–45).⁷

First, seeking full parental consent, Kṛṣṇa calls for Aravāṇ's mother, Ulūpī, who is usually called *Nākakkannī* (Sanskrit *Nāgākanyā*, "Serpent Maiden") in the dramas. As with all of Arjuna's wives, she calls Kṛṣṇa "elder brother," evoking once again the relation between the goddess and Viṣṇu. But in Ulūpī's case, her relationship to Viṣṇu is also deepened. The Sanskrit epic makes her the daughter of the Nāga king Kauravya of the line of Airāvata,

7. Aravāṇ is compared here to Pūru (mistakenly Parataṇ in the chapbook) and Bhīṣma, two other dutiful sons who renounce youth and sexual fulfillment—though not their lives—as "sacrifices" for their fathers, Yayāti and Śāntanu. In contrast, Aravāṇ disparages Kṛṣṇa as a descendant of Yadu (Pūru's undutiful older brother), saying Kṛṣṇa's lineage is born "through the legs" of one who ran away from his father's demand (AK, 44–45). On Yayāti, consult further chap. 3, n. 6; chap. 5, n. 28, chap. 10, n.3.

the elephant mount of Indra (see *Mbh.* 1.206.18; 6.86.6–7). This genealogical coalescence of serpent and elephant in Aravāṇ's ancestry has further echoes in his Tamil folk mythology. In certain accounts, an elephant is offered along with Aravāṇ (Villi 5.7.1–8) or by the Kauravas, either just before or just after his sacrifice, but in any case as their prewar equivalent to his Kaḷappali.⁸ In the drama, however, there is no elephant sacrifice, and Ulūpī has a different genealogy: she is the daughter of none other than the primal snake Ādiśeṣa (*āticēṣaṇ kumāratti*; AK, 46). According to the pārtiayār Brameesa Mudaliyar, neither Villiputtūr nor Nallāppillai draw any such connection with Ādiśeṣa, a statement I have not found contradicted by the texts. It thus looks as if Aravāṇ's descent from the primal serpent is a folk innovation, one we will begin to appreciate more fully when we see how Aravāṇ "dies."⁹

Ulūpī is quite unreceptive to the idea of her son's sacrifice. For a long time she weeps, pleading with Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇḍavas. But when she goes to Aravāṇ, he tells her she is no longer his mother and he is no longer her son, as he has now dedicated himself to Kālī (AK, 62). Having done her utmost, she goes off in tears.

It is now early morning, and time for one of Kṛṣṇa's tricks. He must move the Amāvāsyā up by a day so that Aravāṇ can keep within the bounds of his promise to Duryodhana, but sacrifice himself for the Pāṇḍavas instead. First he asks the Brahman *purohitas*, or chaplains, to come and consult their almanacs. With little trouble he convinces them that the Amāvāsyā is today, not tomorrow, and encourages them to publicize this and to perform the ancestral offerings (*tarppaṇam*) that are called for on that day.¹⁰ When the sun and moon (the gods Sūrya and Candra) see the Brahmans performing their offerings a day early, they come together, amid great celestial fanfare, to find out why. Kṛṣṇa tells them that as the definition of the Amāvāsyā is the "coming to-

8. See Francis 1906, 375–76; Oppert 1893, 97; Gros and Nagaswamy 1970, 122; Shulman 1980a, 127–28, pointing out important affinities between serpents and elephants. The Pakkiriṇṇaiyam troupe refers to the Kauravas' elephant sacrifice as occurring after Aravāṇ's kaḷappali. On elephant sacrifices to the goddess, see also Roghair 1982, 165, 273–76; Nirmala Devi and Murugan 1987, 43.

9. Ulūpī is also referred to as the daughter of Ādiśeṣa in the ballad *Ēṇiyēṛram* (Devanathachar 1925–26, 212), probably from the seventeenth or eighteenth century (Arunachalam 1976, 47–56, 199–203).

10. The purohitas' compliance combines a parody of Brahman gullibility with a bow to Brahman insight: "Can you think of something in your sacred mind [*tiruvuḷḷam*] that will not come to be?" they ask (AK, 66).

gether" of the sun and the moon, their joint appearance settles the question (AK, 67; cf. Venkatesa Acharya 1981, 141). Sūrya and Candra laugh appreciatively and return to their stations.

From here on, Kṛṣṇa orchestrates the sacrifice. He asks Aravāṇ if he will cheat in any way, and Aravāṇ assures him he is fearless. Kṛṣṇa then tells him to take up a knife (*curi*) for the miracle (*arputam*) of cutting his own body (AK, 68). Aravāṇ tells Kṛṣṇa to regard his firmness (*uruti*). He is ready for the battlefield sacrifice, but requests three boons in compensation:

The world would not censure me if I died in the Bhārata war being married, or if I were to die on a day in the war at the hands of a great hero. Being in a good position [*nallapatavi*] for seeing that entire war, if you give this boon I will willingly perform the sacrifice (AK, 69).

In other words, he wants (1) to be married before the Kaḷappali, since to die as an unmarried boy would deprive him of the right to cremation and ancestral funeral oblations;¹¹ (2) to be slain in the war by a great hero, that is, to live on after the Kaḷappali long enough to die a heroic death on the battlefield; and (3) to be able to observe the "entire" eighteen-day war. Kṛṣṇa agrees to grant boons two and three,¹² but asks who will let their daughter marry someone just about to die. Then as Kṛṣṇa leaves the stage in his own form, he immediately solves this problem by reappearing (another actor appears) transformed into Mohinī, the "Enchantress," dancing with twinkling and shining jewels and radiant, according to her song, as a crore of suns (AK, 70–71). Aravāṇ ties the tāli around her neck to signify their quite unconsumed marriage, and Mohinī returns to her heavenly abode.

These three boons—the other two await later fulfillment—are an important index of the play's incorporation of cult-related themes, for the classical Tamil versions of the epic mention only one boon, the second: that Aravāṇ should live on, despite his sacrifice, to die on the battlefield by the hand of a hero.¹³ This, the least interesting of Aravāṇ's requests, is clearly no more than the necessary link that had to be forged once the story of Aravāṇ's pre-war sacrifice was incorporated into a narrative that continued to have him killed on the eighth day of battle by the Rākṣasa Alambuṣa. The other

11. Bachelor youths are buried. The chapbook play does not mention this, but it is made clear in performance.

12. Local informants at Tindivanam attributed the third boon to Śiva.

13. See Venkatesa Acharya 1981, 142–43 (Kṛṣṇa blesses him to live on to the eighth day); Villi 5.7.6; Nallāppillai 5.4.39.

two demands, however, seem to represent a fusion of themes drawn from some of Aravāṇ's most significant features in the two *Mahābhārata* cults that honor him. To put it simply, the marriage boon must be drawn from the Aravāṇ-Kūttāṇṭavar cult, and the boon of watching the war must be rooted in the Draupadī cult. In the first case, Mohinī's marriage to Aravāṇ is the mythic prototype for one of the key ritual practices in the Kūttāṇṭavar cult: the wearing of the tāli and usually the saree by male celebrants—mostly ordinary farmers, but in some cases also eunuchs and transvestites—in order to fulfill their self-effacing vows to "widow" themselves after "marrying" the doomed, self-mutilating god.¹⁴ And in the second case, Aravāṇ's ability to see the entire war reflects the practice in the Draupadī cult of setting up a clay image of his head on a post to watch the ritual proceedings that represent the war, from its beginning to its end.

Moreover, we should appreciate that boons two and three are contradictory. How can Kṛṣṇa enable Aravāṇ to watch the entire war without losing his "life" if he is to be slain by a hero on the eighth day? Each cult has its own solutions. In the Kūttāṇṭavar cult, Aravāṇ's body is said to be reconstituted after his sacrifice, as we shall soon see in discussing "Aravāṇ's Fight with Alambu-ṣaṇ," the drama that deals with Aravāṇ's eighth-day fight. He can thus watch the war only till the eighth day, the day of his death. At Draupadī festivals this version is known, especially by pāratyārs familiar with both cults. But there is also the popular view, maintained for instance by the chief trustee of the Tindivanam Draupadī temple and implied by the Draupadī cult rituals, that Aravāṇ watches the entire war with his severed head (see Richards 1910, 30). A third view is that he watches the war with his reconstituted body till the eighth day, and then, once he is killed, with his detached head through to the war's conclusion. This is the most satisfying solution, though my two Terukkūttu informants were the only ones to ever offer it. It would seem, however, to be supported by the sequel play in which Aravāṇ's head "still looked life-like [*uyirum pārvaiyum*] and beautiful" after his eighth-day decapitation (Pūvaṇ, n.d., 41).¹⁵

14. See Garstin 1878, 214; Francis 1906, 375–76; Baliga 1962, 479–80; Whitehead 1921, 26–28; Shulman 1980a, 306–7. I am preparing a separate study of the Kūttāṇṭavar cult.

15. However, the Kūttāṇṭavar cult also provides a means to understand the vitality of the head, as the latter is ritually revived by Kālī after the hero's death. In the play, as if with this cultic background in mind, the head's lifelike look and beauty are due to the blessing of Kālī (Mākālī; AAC, 41).

With all his favors granted, then, Aravāṇ is finally ready for his Kaḷappali. At nightfall, Kṛṣṇa says it is time to go to Kurukṣetra (AK, 71). Ulūpi comes again to weep. Dharma makes offerings in the weapon hall (*āyutacālai*) in honor of Kālī (Kālikātēvi). And the fearful goddess comes before Dharma's royal presence (*koḷu*) on the battlefield,¹⁶ drums and trident (*cūlam*) in hand, dancing and singing of herself as the "Great Kālī of Heroes." Dharma welcomes the goddess, honors and anoints her. Meanwhile, as Aravāṇ offers obeisance to her, Arjuna weeps affectionately for his son and decries his own inability to prevent the sacrifice.

According to my Terukkūttu informants, at this point possession may come (*āvēcam varutal*) upon both the actors portraying Arjuna and Kālī, and men and women in the audience may shout "Kōvintā" (cf. chap. 11, sec. C). But Aravāṇ, in contrast, will be stern, brave, and impassive. When I observed their troupe perform this scene in a nonfestival context, there were no possessions, but the enactment of Aravāṇ's sacrifice was as they described. Aravāṇ is not merely resolute, but stiff and silent. The actor removes his chest plate (*mārkkam*) and shoulder epaulettes (*pujaṅkal*), and then, kneeling on one knee and setting the other leg out stiffly before him, he draws a cloth over his shoulders and around his body to indicate the cutting of the rest of his thirty-two "limbs." All the offerings—the bits of flesh supposedly removed from these spots—are placed in a large brass or copper pot (*kopparai*) or "sacrificial vessel" (*palipāttiram*).¹⁷ It is worth noting that the immobile actor, kneeling and draped from the neck down, looks much like the head of Aravāṇ as it is set on a post (or post-body) for the Draupadi cult *paṭukaḷam* rituals. Frasca, however, observed a very different enactment of this scene: "At exactly the point where his sacrifice is symbolized by the sacrifice of a chicken on-stage, the performer wearing the Aravāṇ *vēṣam* flies into a deep, loud possession" and is carried into the changing room (1984, 308). Clearly we are dealing with different troupes' varying interpretations of the scene as an occasion of possession.¹⁸ The chapbook drama offers no clues as to which actors are possessed, but the Pakkiriṭṭaiyam troupe's interpretation of Aravāṇ's composure is certainly the closer in tone to the rich description of the scene in the prose elaboration of the

16. *Koḷu* also can mean house decorations during the Navarātra festival (*Tamil Lexicon*, s.v.; Fuller and Logan 1985, 84, 97).

17. The first term is used in AK, 77, the latter by Brameesa Mudaliyar. My two Terukkūttu informants and the Tindivanam pūcāri—speaking on the ritual performance of this scene—described the pot as one for making ghee: a *ney kopparai*.

18. Cf. chap. 18, sec. B: varied possession enactments at Duryodhana's death.

Nallāppillai *Pāratam*. There, amid a long string of negative principles describing Aravāṇ's self-control, he is said to have offered his pieces of flesh to Kālī "without fearing, without desiring long life, without shedding tears," and, most interestingly, "without speaking from his mouth, and without shivering" (*vāy pecāmāl tēkan tuṭiyāmāl*; Caṇmukakkavirāyar 1969, vol. 2, *Uttiyōka Parvam*, p. 214). Once again we are reminded of ritual prescriptions for animal sacrifices, in which, of course, the animal *should* shiver, as was observed above in connection with Aravāṇ's bristling hair.

As to Aravāṇ's thirty-two self-mutilations, there are some noteworthy exclusions. According to Adikeshava Pillai, the *pāratiyār* at the 1982 Mēlaccēri Draupadī festival who also performs at Kūttāṇṭavar festivals, Aravāṇ does not cut off his head or even apply his knife directly to his neck. Rather, the thirty-two gashes that mar his thirty-two marks of bodily perfection are the following: one cut each for the head, nose, chest, stomach, temple (*sic*), and point between the eyebrows; two cuts each for the ear lobes, lips, knuckles, wrists, elbows, shoulders (*pujam*), knees, and insteps; and ten cuts for the toes. In view of the worship of Aravāṇ by eunuchs in the Kūttāṇṭavar cult, exclusion of the penis encourages some restraint in defining all of this as "castration imagery," although such an interpretation is eventually unavoidable (cf. Shulman, 1980a, 307).

The rite of thirty-two cuts also differs from the practice of making nine cuts in the ancient navakaṇṭam ritual. The culminating cut does not seem to involve the head, though it is surely the head alone that remains in view when the enactment is finished. And of course the numbers differ. The nine plus one of the Navakaṇṭam most likely evokes the associations between Durgā and the number nine that are most evident in the "nine nights" of Navarātra followed by the Victory Tenth, the latter represented by the hand-held severed head, Victory's surest sign. But Aravāṇ's severed head is a common icon at Draupadī temples. It is found often in a portable wooden form (e.g., *Virapāṇṭi*, Sowcarpet); sometimes in its own chapel to the main temple's southeast, facing Muttāl Rāvuttan (Papanasam, probably Kumbhakonam);¹⁹ and sometimes posted on

19. For information on two temples around Papanasam, my thanks to Eveline Masilamani-Meyer (personal communication; cf. chap. 6, sec. C). The huge Kumbhakonam head of Aravāṇ, about eight feet high, photographed and discussed before 1916 (Shastri [1916] 1974, 127–28 and fig. 139), was still standing in 1977. As Muttāl Rāvuttan had not yet entered my horizons in 1977, I did not note whether one of his icons faced Aravāṇ's. But Kumbhakonam's proximity to Papanasam makes it likely that this is a regional pattern.

a southeast edge of the temple roof (Tūci, Cantirampāṭi; see plate 15) or the outer wall over the main gateway (Kanchipuram). Indeed, a fresco painting of Aravān's Kaḷappali in the ardhamaṇḍapa of the Sowcarpet (Madras) temple shows him standing as a be-headed trunk, holding out his head on a tray to a four-armed Kālī (plate 16). It would thus appear that the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas do not vie for the *iḍā* simply as a principle of sacrificial fecundity. With the object of their contention a living human head, they vie for a most potent image of the "remainder" of the sacrifice, the principle of sacrificial regeneration and continuity (see Malamoud 1972). Indeed, they contend for nothing less than a concrete, mythic image of the "head of the sacrifice," a symbol of the violent sacrificial remainder that, according to Heesterman, was removed in the Brāhmaṇical Śrauta sacrifice from the realm of actual agonistic ritual to the realms of abstraction, mythology, and folk festival survivals.²⁰

Furthermore, the number of Aravān's thirty-two cuts suggests a doubling of the number sixteen that is associated with the Vedic Puruṣa, the perfect male victim. Indeed, Aravān—like another of Arjuna's sons, Abhimanyu (see chap. 18, sec. A)—is according to my dramatist informants precisely sixteen years old, the "proper time" (*tati paruvam*) for marriage and also, in the case of both of these brothers, for their sacrificial deaths in battle. In fact, it is possible to regard both youths as successive sacrificial substitutes for Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa. As Kṛṣṇa himself indicates, both he and Arjuna are suitable victims for Kaḷappali. Each embodies different dimensions of the ideal Puruṣa. Thus the epic Arjuna-Nara represents the *puruṣa* as "soul" (see Hiltebeitel 1984a, with citations); and as the exemplary "sacrificer" (*yajamāna*) among his brothers, he requires victims who will serve as his surrogates. Kṛṣṇa is of course Puruṣottama, the "Supreme Puruṣa," the divine model for all who would make sacrificial self-offerings.

The precise placing of most of the cuts at bodily joints indicates that the marring of Aravān's perfection is not just a destruction of his beauty, but of his bodily fine-tuning. He is a hero who, ac-

20. Heesterman 1985, 50. I follow, of course, a similar process of transformation from ritual to myth in the residues of "village" sacrifices in the Draupadī cult *Mahābhārata*. Indeed, throughout his seminal study of the severed head, Heesterman argues that the dualistic, agonistic patterns that are largely eliminated from, or disguised in, the systematized Śrauta rituals, have continuities that link the pre-systematized rites that he hypothetically reconstructs to current village festivals (48 n. 27) and the conflict mythologies—both Brāhmaṇical and epic (48, 56)—of the sacrificial terrain of Kurukṣetra.

cording to Kṛṣṇa, could have wiped out the Kauravas on his own in a single day. In fact, it is this menacing capacity that provides Kṛṣṇa with one of his justifications for engineering Aravān's sacrifice, for it is one of Kṛṣṇa's concerns to see that Arjuna and the other Pāṇḍavas succeed in fulfilling their various war vows without being upstaged by their sons (see AAC, 36–37; Shulman, 1980a, 128; and below, chap. 18, sec. B).

The play ends with Ulūpī lamenting over her son, and Kālī blessing the Pāṇḍavas for victory. But the sequel drama about Aravān must be noted here, even though informants tell me it is performed primarily at Kūttāṇṭavar festivals, and rarely if ever at Draupadī festivals. It will be no surprise to us that Alambuṣa retains his classical epic identity as another kinsman—a younger brother—of Baka.²¹ The main action of the sequel concerns the dressing up of Aravān as a warrior for his eighth-day fight, and his valiant defeat by the demon. Given that possession scenes follow Aravān's "deaths" in both the Draupadī and Kūttāṇṭavar cults, it is suggestive that when Alambuṣa beheads Irāvat in the Sanskrit epic, the warriors on both sides appear to be "possessed" (*āviṣṭāḥ*) by Rākṣasas and Bhūtas (*Mbh.* 6.86.85; cf. chap. 11, n. 33).

One important matter behind this episode, not mentioned in the chapbook drama but conveyed through performance, and also in other folkloric variants, concerns the reconstitution of Aravān's body after his Kaḷappali. On this subject, my dramatist informants' account is essentially the same as the version heard from local informants at Kūttāṇṭavar's most celebrated temple at Kūvākkam. After Aravān has removed his flesh in thirty-two places, he becomes nothing more than a skeleton. But as Kṛṣṇa has promised to let him fight in the war, he tells Aravān to call on his grandfather Ādiśeṣa, the "primal serpent remainder" upon whom Kṛṣṇa himself, as Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa, lies sleeping after the dissolution of the universe. Aravān prays to Ādiśeṣa, and the great serpent comes from Nāgaloka and coils his body around Aravān's remains. In this way, Ādiśeṣa's flesh becomes Aravān's and his body is restored. Thus Aravān gets back his strength (*palam*) and is able to fight in the eighth-day battle.

Let us note that there are less "primal" versions of this restoration. According to the icon sculptor N. Dandapani, all of Aravān's snake relatives—Ādiśeṣa in this case being just one of many—come to coil themselves around him. Brameesa Mudaliyar, who denied

21. AAC, 22; cf. chap. 8, n. 11; chap. 10, n. 1; and chap. 13, sec. A. Cf also Villi 6.8.20.

Aravāṇ's descent from the primal serpent, maintains that Aravāṇ only recovers his own snake form (*nākarūpam*) for his eighth-day fight. His version apparently reflects the account in the *Villipāratam*, where Aravāṇ assumes a "powerful form" in which he is able, through his *māyā*, to project numerous poison-spewing snakes (6.8.21–22).

I think, however, one is justified in regarding the restoration by Ādiśeṣa as the most popular and widely diffused "folk" version. More than this, even though it is without foundation in the classical Tamil versions of the epic,²² I suspect it owes at least some of its inspiration to the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*. For there, when Irāvata needs help, it comes from an unnamed member of his mother's lineage (*anvayo mātṛkas tasya*)—that is, of course, a Nāga—who arrives surrounded by many other Nāgas and assumes "a mighty form like the serpent Ananta" (*dadhāra sumahad rūpam ananta iva bhogavān*; 6.86.66–67). The fact that he is unnamed (an epic rarity) is clearly an indication that what counts is the comparison with the divine serpent. Ananta, "The Endless," is but another name for Ādiśeṣa, the "Primal Remainder": in either case, the "endless" serpent whose body spatially surrounds the universe, and who temporally and materially is the "remainder" from which one universe, once destroyed, forms continuity with another that will be created. This Nāga does not help Irāvata by replenishing his flesh: as we have seen, in the Sanskrit epic Irāvata has not performed Kaṭappali. Rather, apparently using his own *māyā*, he causes Alambuṣa to be hidden from Irāvata (and vice versa) by screening him with other "Nāgas of many kinds" (6.86.67–68). We know that the unnamed Nāga in the Sanskrit epic cannot be Ananta himself, for not only is he compared with him, but he is soon devoured along with all the other snakes he has created (6.86.68–69). But it is quite possible that this "Ananta-like" Nāga has made a sort of end run around the classical Tamil *Mahābhārata* tradition to reappear, his role enriched, in this Tamil *Mahābhārata* folklore.

No matter what form Aravāṇ's ophidian revival (or recovery) takes, it becomes the cause of his downfall. In the Sanskrit epic, Alambuṣa is merely said to have reflected (*dhyātvā*) on the surrounding snakes, assumed the form of Suparṇa (or Garuḍa, Viṣṇu's "eagle" mount and the perennial foe of Nāgas), devoured all the snakes, and then killed the "bewildered Irāvata" with his sword

22. The prose Nallāppillai (Caṇmukakkavirāyar 1969, 3: 113–15) is much the same as Villi.

(6.86.68–69).²³ In Villi, Alambuṣa projects numerous Garuḍas with his own māyā in order to diminish (*eñcu*) the snakes created by Aravān's māya before killing him (6.8.22). In the drama, however, the opposition between the Nāgas and Garuḍa is once again orchestrated by Kṛṣṇa. Just as he tells Aravān to call on Ādiśeṣa to restore his body, Kṛṣṇa now calls forth Garuḍa to bring about Aravān's demise. In the printed play, when Kṛṣṇa sees that Aravān may decimate the entire Kaurava army, he arranges for a heavenly voice to tell Alambuṣa to take the disguise of Garuḍa, and when this "Garuḍa" appears, Aravān's strength vanishes and Alambuṣa beheads him (ACC, 38–41). According to my two dramatist informants, however, when Kṛṣṇa sees that Aravān will run amok, he sends Garuḍa himself. At the sight of this real Garuḍa, Ādiśeṣa weakens and becomes afraid. As soon as Garuḍa approaches, the primal serpent uncoils himself from around Aravān's body and leaves him defenseless against his attacker.

Aravān thus finds himself in the very middle of the symbolic alternation in the myths of complementarity and conflict between Viṣṇu's two "eternal" iconographic companions: his celestial bird mount Garuḍa, whom he rides through the skies of the diurnal universe, the manifest world of the day of Brahmā, and his serpent couch Ādiśeṣa, the "primal remainder" (*śeṣa*) upon whom he sleeps during the night of Brahmā once the manifest world has dissolved. In this connection, the Draupadī cult *Mahābhārata* keeps us from falling into the lamentable scholarly habit of regarding the mythology of Viṣṇu as somehow separate from the figure of Kṛṣṇa. Not only is it Kṛṣṇa who causes Garuḍa to appear before Aravān, but throughout the cycle of Draupadī cult rituals, Kṛṣṇa's processional wooden icons invariably show him seated on this winged mount. Here Garuḍa's mythic appearance, no less than his ritual ones, has a sinister side. He appears, at Kṛṣṇa's bidding, as a harbinger of death. We thus encounter in Aravān's sacrifice a striking combination of cultic and iconographic images, for this heroic figure is ultimately a head on a post,²⁴ drawing to himself the bird that is at once the bearer of Kṛṣṇa's divine grace and a sign of

23. See Biardeau CR 89, 222–23, 236, on the use of the name Suparṇa in the wider context of the Sanskrit epic's portrayal of this scene.

24. It is the same in both the Draupadī cult and the Kūttāṇṭavar cult, with the exception that in the latter, at least at Kūvākkam, the post for Aravān's head is mounted on a chariot rather than set in the ground. Compare the Kurukṣetra area folklore about Bhuriśravas mentioned above.

pending destruction. Moreover, Aravān's head is the remainder of a self-sacrifice that marks the beginning of the *Mahābhārata* war and is also, through his "watching" the war from this ritual vantage point, the principle of continuity and regeneration from its beginning to its end (cf. Shulman, 1981a, 127–29, 306–7, 347). Finally, in the folk version that concerns us most, the life of this head is initially sustained by the primal serpent who embodies the "remainder" and continuity of the universe.

16

Pōrmannan's Fight: Pōttu Rāja at Kurukṣetra

Now that this study of the Draupadī cult's *Mahābhārata* mythology has reached the eve of the war, it is time to return to Pōttu Rāja. This irrepressible figure has graced our study at numerous points. In addition to discussing his collaboration with Draupadī in her Gingee *avatāra*, I have noted the etymology of his name as "Buffalo King," and its use as a Pallava title; his alternate name Pōrmannan, "War King"; his links with the vaṇṇi-śamī tree, the sacrificial post, and certain sacrificial "weapons"; his connections with possession; and his joint guardianship of Draupadī with Muttāl Rāvuttan, the latter handling real sacrifices on the periphery of her cult while Pōttu Rāja takes charge of the symbolic sacrifices that reenact the *Mahābhārata* myth of the sacrifice of battle. In this chapter and the next, one must keep these features of Pōttu Rāja in view. But we must now come to terms with his specifically epic mythology as the "War King" Pōrmannan. We will thus finally take Pōrmannan head on: a pun that I risk as an invitation to meditate on a fundamental conundrum that carries forward from earlier discussions of Pōttu Rāja and Aravān into the very heart of the Draupadī cult's epic mythology: whose head is off, and whose head is on?

In approaching the question, we must once again wrestle with the remarkable diversity of this mythology, which is as evident and significant in the "popular" Pōrmannan stories as it is in the more "classicist" Cunītan-Pōttu Rāja cycle. Indeed, the varied character of both groups of stories forms a response to the ritual problematics of the cult in a way that far surpasses any other facet of Draupadī cult mythology. We have seen other cases—Muttāl Rāvuttan, Arjuna's additional wives, *Turōpatai Kuṟavañci*, Aravān's sacrifice—where aspects of cult ritual have been linked with innovations in the epic story. But nowhere else is there such a proliferation of ritually linked variants. Thus even though the play "Pōrmannan's Fight" is performed only infrequently at Draupadī festivals, this is

no gauge of its significance.¹ If it is not performed, perhaps a version of the Pōttu Rāja story will be told by a pāratīyār. And even if there is no performance of any form of the story, something will be told implicitly in the iconography of the Draupadī temple and its festival. For whether or not the local icons—the fixed image of stone facing into the Draupadī temple, and the portable image of metal or wood carried in processions—are called Pōrmaṇṇaṇ or Pōttu Rāja, the ceremonies in which they are involved are essentially the same and have the same underlying narrative implications. This is a vital matter, for Pōttu Rāja (or Pōrmaṇṇaṇ) is virtually omnipresent in the Draupadī cult ritual cycle.

As to the two names, though we have noted that Pōrmaṇṇaṇ is the one favored in traditions affected by the Terukkūttu, there is no absolute rule as to where, when, and by whom they are used. Most interesting is a distinction found at Cīrūvālai, where the fixed stone image is called Pōttu Rāja while the wooden processional icon is called Pōrmaṇṇaṇ. This suggests an affinity between Pōttu Rāja and the fixed ritual apparatus of the temple (the *bali-pīṭham* and flagstaff), and a corresponding affinity between Pōrmaṇṇaṇ the “War King” and the warlike symbolism of the processions he leads. But this very logical distinction between the names was found nowhere else.

There are, however, certain hints from the iconography that must be kept in mind as we move from the Cūṇitaṇ cycle discussed in chapter 5 to the mythology of Pōrmaṇṇaṇ. In the Cūṇitaṇ myths, no matter which name is used, the outcome is always the same: Pōttu Rāja (or more rarely Pōrmaṇṇaṇ) holds the last head of Draupadī’s demon victim. This accords with the fact that his icons usually show him holding a severed head. Of the thirty-three images on which I have retained information, nineteen hold a head. These include both wooden processional icons and stationary stone images facing into the temple (see plates 17, 18). Moreover, in at least two cases, at Tindivanam and Cuddalore, the figure holding the head was identified as Pōrmaṇṇaṇ.² In all but one case—Cīṇṇapāpucamuttiram, where Pōttu Rāja holds the head of a tiger—the head is human.

1. In addition to its usual inclusion at Tindivanam and its optional performances at Maṅkaḷam and Marutāṭu (see table 6), it was said to be one of eight plays at Cantirampāti, which also included “Draupadī the Gypsy” in its cycle. The Pakkīrpalaiyam troupe regards these two as among its four special plays, along with “Kṛṣṇa’s Water Sports” and “Aravāṇ’s Sacrifice.”

2. It depends, of course, on the informant. At Tindivanam, for instance, what was Pōttu Rāja to the pāratīyārs was Pōrmaṇṇaṇ to the pūcāri.

But it is not at all uncommon to find Pōttu Rāja or Pōrmannan holding an animal instead: a whole animal, that is, and not just the head. Of the remaining fourteen such images, ten show him with a lion. Most of these are wooden processional icons (see plate 19), on eight of which the lion was found, and on seven the head. But he also sometimes holds the lion in the stone reliefs as well. Where he does hold the lion, it is usually in a subdued position, by the tail, mane, or forepaws. Sometimes the animal merely sits dutifully at his side. In a single instance at Virapāṇṭi, two stone images in the Pōttu Rāja maṇḍapa show him holding an elephant (once by the trunk, once by the neck), while the wooden processional image in the same place has him holding the lion. He has also been found holding a goat (at the Kilari Road temple in Bangalore), a bandicoot (at the Blackpalli temple in Bangalore: see Richards 1910, 31), and a deer (*māṇ*, at Kaḷampūr). It is significant that except for the deer, these animals are found outside our core area, leaving us with the impression that within that area the main variations are the human head, the lion, and the rare deer, tiger head, or elephant.

Now the Pōrmannan myths will also explain how it is that he too can come to hold a human head. But no demon is involved, and it is an entirely different story from the one we met in chapter 5. Moreover, the head-holding incident is not found in all versions of the Pōrmannan story. This would lead one to suspect that icons that show our hero holding a lion (or elephant) in his hand rather than a human head might "originally" be linked more with the name Pōrmannan than with Pōttu Rāja. Indeed, where it is a question of such fierce or large animals, the usual explanation is that they indicate the hero's great valor or strength. This would befit Pōrmannan's name and reputation as the "War King." But there does not appear to be any consistent correlation between the appearance of these animals on the icon and the name Pōrmannan. Cīruvālai, where the wooden icon is called Pōrmannan and the stone image Pōttu Rāja, is one of the places where the wooden Pōrmannan carries a human head. According to the icon sculptor N. Dandapani, an authority on such matters but one of the very few people to claim distinct identities for the two names, it is Pōrmannan who holds the head as a servant of Draupadī, while Pōttu Rāja holds the lion as a servant of Māriyamman!

I have not found his distinction more generalizable than any other, but it is significant as a reminder that the lion's connection with Māriyamman—and sometimes with Draupadī—is ultimately an evocation of the lion mount of Durgā. At this point it is fitting

to recall Biardeau's pathbreaking insight about the figure of Pōttu Rāja: "It appears finally undoubtable, because perfectly logical, that Pōttu Rāja is identical with Maḥiṣāsura, but with a Maḥiṣāsura who has been converted"—by his death at Durgā's hands (1981a, 238; see chap. 5, sec. B). This insight will provide an indispensable key to the mythology of Pōrmaṇṇa.³

As to the name that goes with the lion, however, as Dandapani's distinction would suggest, it is probably still the Pōttu Rāja identity that is most at play. Let us recall that in one pāratyār version of the Cunītaṇ cycle, the demon whose last head Pōttu Rāja must hold can change into animal forms, a ruse I linked in chapter 5 with the lion and elephant forms that Maḥiṣāsura assumes before he is finally dispatched in his ultimate human form by the goddess. It would seem that when Pōttu Rāja holds the lion or the elephant, he is the former Buffalo Demon, converted into the Buffalo King, who now holds the tamed and subdued animal forms that were once his. Or alternatively, where it is a question of the lion alone, the Buffalo King now holds in subjection the lion mount of the goddess, which had formerly subdued him during her conquest of his unregenerate self, the Buffalo Demon.

In any case, one can go no further with Pōttu Rāja or Pōrmaṇṇa without keeping such connections and transformations in mind.

A. "Pōrmaṇṇa's Fight"

If one regards the Cunītaṇ cycle as presenting a set of variant strategies, favored largely by the pāratyārs, for bringing Draupadī together with Pōttu Rāja outside the main story of the *Mahābhārata*, then one may regard the Pōrmaṇṇa stories, favored above all by the Terukkūttu, as a means to bring them together within the epic story. That the dramatists would have such a design is not surprising, since they are hired at Draupadī festivals to present plays in a *Mahābhārata* cycle. This is not to say that the Pōrmaṇṇa story is known only in the Terukkūttu milieu. I have, for instance, met it in local variants at Chinna Salem and Kolar, outside the area

3. cf. Vetschera 1978, 126, 142–43: In myths from the Potrāj cult of Maharashtra, before the goddess kills Maḥiṣāsura, he gets her promise that he will become her watchman-guardian-charioteer, with his "idol" outside her temple, and that he will receive the blood of the buffaloes offered to her. Here the human Potrāj is differentiated from the iconic guardian, who is named Kotawāla, "Watchman" (like Bhairava in Banaras). Biardeau has intuited the same logic where the iconic guardian, alias Maḥiṣa, is Pōta Rāju himself. Compare the myths of Talavāy Mātaṇ, the Brahman Dakṣa beheaded by Virabhadra who takes on his new Kuladeva identity once his head has been replaced by a bull's (Reiniche 1979, 130–33).

frequented by today's Terukkūttu troupes. Nevertheless, in all likelihood it is of Terukkūttu origin, for the dramatists are the logical mediators between the ritual requirements of the Draupadī cult and the mythical potential of the *Mahābhārata*. This should not dispose us to think of the Pōrmaṇṇaṇ story as necessarily the younger of the two cycles. As we shall see, its rendition as Draupadī cult drama relies on a variety of archaic mythical and ritual traditions, and it seems to have incorporated some of the most widely diffused and ancient features of the cult and mythology of Pōttu Rāja himself.

Kōtaṇṭarāma Upāttiyāyar, author of the chapbook version of *Pōrmaṇṇaṇ Caṇṭai*, from Variṇcippākkam village in Cuddalore Taluk, South Arcot, seems to be the only one of our published Terukkūttu playwrights to dedicate his dramas to Vīrapāṇcālī (1980, 1: henceforth PMC; cf. TKC, 1).⁴ Along with these signs of the drama's folk character and cultic venue, the title Upāttiyāyar—the re-Sanskritized “literary” form of Vāttiyār, “troupe director”—also suggests the author's ties with the Terukkūttu performance milieu. The performed versions by the Pakkiriṇṭaiyāy troupe stayed fairly close to his chapbook version.⁵ But no familiarity with the text, astonishing as it is, could prepare one for the zest and zaniness of their performance, or for the added twists they introduced. Unless it shares the distinction with “Kṛṣṇa's Water Sports,” “Pōrmaṇṇaṇ's Fight” is the most rambunctious play of the lot. One senses that it releases the characters of the *Mahābhārata* from their responsibilities to classical textual traditions and allows them for one last time to “act like themselves,” as villagers' eyes would see them, before they must finally turn to their most serious epic business: the *Mahābhārata* war.

The play opens with the Pāṇḍavas at a place called Nūtaṇṭapuri, “New City” or “Extraordinary City,” seemingly a reinterpretative name for Upaplavya, the city in the kingdom of Matsya where they await the outcome of negotiations for peace or war after their period

4. Unfortunately, I do not know when Kōtaṇṭarāma Upāttiyāyar wrote. His *Pōrmaṇṇaṇ Caṇṭai* is not found in the India Office Library or Perumal lists, but these include little from the smaller presses. To judge from his name, he was probably a Vaṇṇiyar.

5. Privately arranged performances were staged 16 January and 17 April 1982, the first at Pakkiriṇṭaiyāy, the second at Cinnapāpucamuttiram (villages no more than twenty-five miles from Variṇcippākkam, the home of the drama's author). Unless specifically noted, I follow these two performances, but I also comment on a shortened version of the 1986 festival performance at Maṅkaḷam by the Nāṇavēl troupe of Tēvikāppuram, which they performed for me after I arrived too late for the full version.

of concealment.⁶ There they perform tapas to Kṛṣṇa (or in performance Draupadī prays to Kṛṣṇa), and Kṛṣṇa appears, just back from his embassy to Hāstinapura.⁷

After the Pāṇḍavas greet him, he asks to see Draupadī, who comes forth, falls at her "elder brother's" feet, reminds him of all her trials, and asks when she will be able to dress her hair with Duryodhana's bone (*elumpu*) as her comb (PMC, 9). Kṛṣṇa reassures her that all this will come to pass on the eighteenth day of battle. Then he tells her to call for Bhīma, whom he addresses as follows:

Listen, Bhīmasena. Having lost the kingdom and country playing dice with your relatives [*pañkālīs*, "co-sharers"; cf. chap. 13, n. 34], thirteen years have now passed since you went into the forest. If we wait around, nothing will be achieved. The eighteenth day of the eighteen-day war won't be completed for you. Pāñcālī, being [none other than] Yājñasenī [*yāḥacēṇīyākiya pāñcālī*], needs to have the heroic whip, heroic pampai drum, heroic turmeric powder, heroic mallāri drum, and the pūcārī's turmeric box [*viracāṭṭi virampai* (sic) *virakentakam* (sic) *viramallāri pañṭāra peṭṭi*]. If all these things are found with my younger sister [Draupadī], then, having won the eighteen-day war, Yājñasenī can tie up her hair, and you can drink water with your hand. But the heroic whip, heroic pampai drum, and so on, are with Pōrmaṇṇaṇ in Civāṇantapuri [henceforth I will use the Sanskrit Śivānandapuri: "The City of the Bliss of Śiva"].

In performance, Kṛṣṇa addresses Draupadī, not Bhīma, when he states these objectives, indicating that the five implements will enable her to put up her hair. We have met them in chapters 5 and 6 in variant groupings in Brameesa Mudaliyar's "Glorification of Draupadī" and Pōrmaṇṇaṇ's conquest of Muttāl Rāvuttan. But "Pōrmaṇṇaṇ's Fight" best clarifies their cultic significance. Kṛṣṇa tells the Pāṇḍavas his plan to obtain the instruments, and ultimately to win Pōrmaṇṇaṇ over to their side for the *Mahābhārata* war. Everything that follows involves the execution of his elaborate scheme.

We now come to the introduction of Pōrmaṇṇaṇ, about whom the chapbook version tells us virtually nothing, except that he is

6. Upaplavaya's suggestive etymology ("Before the Deluge" or "The City to be Overflowed"; Hiltebeitel 1980c, 149) seems to have been lost in the dramas; thus the spellings Upalāpuri Paṭṭaṇam in AK, 20, and Upalāviya Paṭṭaṇam in MPC, 91.
7. PMC, 5: he appears with Mātava (Sanskrit Māhava = Sātyaki), his companion on that mission (KT, 14–15). In the observed performances, he says he returned just yesterday.

in his darbar, performing pūjā with the coveted articles (*PMC*, 15). At this point, the two performances I saw, both by the Pakkiri-pālaiyam troupe, differed considerably. In the first, Pōrmaṇṇan was played by R. S. Mayakrishnan, the younger of the two brothers who were my main dramatist informants. In the second, the part was given to another actor, leaving Mayakrishnan to play Arjuna. Mayakrishnan invested his Pōrmaṇṇan with a wild, robust, zany, and crude animation that was almost entirely lacking in the comically menacing portrayal by the other actor. For the most part, I will follow the Pōrmaṇṇan of Mayakrishnan. But I must note that as the evil genius of a defective flash attachment ruined my record of his virtuoso performance, the photographs I have (plates 20–24) are only of the second rendition.

The curtain now separates Pōrmaṇṇan from the audience. Cymbals, drums, and antiphonal singing intensify, soon joined by sounds of the most unearthly sort: shrieks, howls, an undulating whistle. At last the curtain is removed to reveal Pōrmaṇṇan, red faced, tongue protruding, a tall framed crown topped with red tassels on his head. He jumps onto the musicians' platform, continues his raucous howls, leaps down, hurtles about the stage rushing at the audience, which is beside itself with laughter. Then he engages the Kaṭṭiyaṅkāraṇ in a series of ripostes, interspersed with further gasps and hoots, and introduces himself, his city, and his genealogy.

His lineage, through four generations, runs from Arilingam to Gurulingam to Śivalingam to himself, Pōttilingam. The Kaṭṭiyaṅkāraṇ then adds "Īśvaralingam" as a knowing joke. *Pōtti*, colloquial for *pōrri*, means "praising," and the name refers to Pōrmaṇṇan's pūjās in which he "praises the lingam" of Śiva-Īśvara. All of the ancestral names seem to play on this theme,⁸ though they have other resonances as well. Another of his names, he says, is Pōr-lingam, earned by his great prowess in war.⁹ As to his city, it has seven forts, all named after metals, the first three being of gold, silver, and iron.¹⁰ They are utterly impenetrable, and because he

8. Arilingam could refer to Viṣṇu as Hari (Tamil Ari), but Ari can also refer to Śiva in Tamil, and my informants indicated Śiva is meant.

9. Cf. the Pondicherry account collected by Biardeau (in press; see below) in which this name is connected with his conquest of the fifty-six kings.

10. After the first three forts, the Kaṭṭiyaṅkāraṇ named three more with different terms for gold and silver, a seventh called "Royal Fort" (Rāya Kōṭṭai), and mumbled an eighth for a laugh, implying he had lost count. Forts made of the three initial metals compose the three cities of the Asuras that Śiva destroys in the purāṇic Tripuradahana ("Burning of the Three Cities") myth. Cf. also Roghair 1982, 200: the fort of Kalyāṇ, conquered by Ankālamma with Pōta Rāju's help, has iron, brass, and bronze walls. In Aṅkālammaṇ's Tamil mythology, her foe Vallājarājan sometimes has seven forts, or seven gardens (Meyer 1984, 146–47, 177, 193; cf. Whitehead 1921, 128).

keeps the five pūjā instruments in his fort, he is unvanquishable. Only if someone takes them from him can he be overcome. But anyone who enters his fort will die.

Now Bhīma approaches Śivānandapuri. At Kṛṣṇa's direction, he has disguised himself as a woodseller (*virakaṇ*), and goes by that name or the name Virakutalaiyaṇ, "the man who carries wood on his head." Probably, as Biardeau observed to me, the allusion is to Bhīma's mace. Kṛṣṇa has told him he should try to enter the iron fort by pretending to sell his wares, so he goes about outside the fort hawking. The city, or fort, has a significant background story that, while it was never mentioned by my written or oral sources, obviously provides a "necessary" narrative explanation for this current scene. According to a Reṭṭi pāratīyār interviewed at Pondicherry by Biardeau, once while Śiva was sleeping in the forest, Pārvatī took a piece of wood and drew a *kōlam* design (a sort of labyrinth) on the ground. Inside she placed a fort, a king, Brahmins, Śūdras, and so on. When Śiva awoke he brought the city to life and named it Śivānandapuri. Pōrliṅgam-Pōttu Rāja is fifth in the line of kings that Pārvatī created. The city has one flaw, which explains Kṛṣṇa's directions: Śiva predicted that as the city was traced with wood, so it would be destroyed by wood.¹¹

When Pōrmaṇṇaṇ hears the cries of the woodseller, he unwittingly tells his minister Ukkirapāṇu ("Violent Sun") to bring Bhīma before him. The wind of Bhīma's tread makes Pōrmaṇṇaṇ quaver; amazed at seeing him, Pōrmaṇṇaṇ faints. But his minister rallies him. Bhīma pretends he is hungry and beats his stomach. Following Kṛṣṇa's instructions, he asks permission to rest the logs against the iron fort wall, which is represented by the curtain held up from the ground by two actors. Permitted this respite, Bhīma sets the logs against the curtain (plate 20), and the "wall" tumbles. The whole fort is ruined. Pōrmaṇṇaṇ, amazed and furious, orders Bhīma imprisoned, and Bhīma allows this since Kṛṣṇa had told him to get caught as a pretext for Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa to come to his rescue.

Informed of Bhīma's plight, Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna prepare for the next phase of Kṛṣṇa's plan. First Arjuna and then Kṛṣṇa is introduced in woman's guise (*peṇveṣam*; plates 21, 22). As they circle

11. For Biardeau's account, see above chap. 5, n. 13. In a manner reminiscent of B. Kothandarama Goundar's version of the Cunitaṇ story (chap. 5, sec. B), this account conflates elements from our two main versions: the mission to secure the five instruments from Pōrliṅgam or Pōttu Rāja (note the informant's apparent rejection of the name Pōrmaṇṇaṇ, most favored by the dramatists) comes *after* the war, and it becomes a question of Kṛṣṇa helping Dharmarāja to become emperor by asserting his rule over the fifty-six kings Pōrliṅgam has conquered.

toward Śivānandapuri, Arjuna minces about in a pink saree, calling himself Vijayāmpāl (or Vicayāmpāl), a play on his own name Vijayan/Vicayan (Sanskrit Vijaya, "Victory") that openly evokes the goddess Durgā for whom Vijayā/Vicayā is a familiar epithet and Ampāl a somewhat archaizing term for "woman," "mother," or "goddess." Kṛṣṇa, on the other hand, is a decrepit hundred-year-old *pāṭṭi* or "grandmother" who claims, cane in hand, to be Vijayāmpāl's mother. Here one recognizes another form of the goddess: that of the ageless yet fertile mother, or primal Śakti (Ādiśakti). We are reminded of the Kuratti disguise that the goddess Aṅkāḷamman assumes—she comes as an old woman (*kilavi*), age one hundred, a grandmother (*pāṭṭi*), sometimes with a cane, sometimes with her own child on her arm—to enter the fort of Vallālarājan to predict his and his queen's deaths and their fort's destruction (Meyer 1984, 10, 27, 44–45, 50, 161, 185, 190; cf. chap. 12 and chap. 13, sec. C).

When this portentuous pair reaches Śivānandapuri, they announce that they are the mother and sister of Viṛakan the wood-seller and cry over his loss. Pōrmanṇan hears them and orders them brought before him. When he sees the old lady, he asks how old she is and falls off the stage when he learns that she is a hundred. But he registers no surprise when he learns that her daughter Vijayāmpāl is but sixteen (the age, let us note, of Arjuna's two doomed children, Aravāṇ and Abhimanyu). Rather, seeing her beauty, he is smitten with desire and knocks the old lady over in grabbing after the girl. He sticks his tongue in and out, keeping up a mad chase, until finally he says he wants to marry her and will do anything to have her. First the old lady says she will give him her daughter if she gets her son Viṛakan back (PMC, 25). Pōrmanṇan immediately releases Viṛakan and asks what else she wants. Falling all over himself, he hears that the old lady has lost her pūjā articles and wants to finish her Śivapūjā in eight days. If she can do that, borrowing Pōrmanṇan's articles of worship, then she will give him the girl.¹² When Pōrmanṇan tries to fetch his pūjā articles, they cry out "don't give me away" (PMC, 27). But Pōrmanṇan, obsessed with Vijayāmpāl, ignores them.

Pōrmanṇan's pūjā articles are not supplied from the small bag of props and costumes that travels with the drama troupe from village to village. Rather, they are supplied by the local temple that sponsors the play as part of its festival. In temple rituals these

12. In the chapbook, she demands her first food in three days, and having omitted her two daily pūjās for that time, asks to borrow the articles for the six pūjās. She also mentions leaving her *pūcai peṭṭi* (pūjā box) at her son's home (PMC, 26).

articles sometimes adorn the icon of Draupadī, and more regularly that of Pōttu Rāja (or Pōrmaṇṇaṇ). So when the actor Pōrmaṇṇaṇ brings them out and stands for a moment in full regalia with whip, multi-tined lance, and so on, he strikes a true iconic presence.

When he finally hands the items over, it is not to the old lady but to Vijayāmpāl. The grandmother then says she must go outside the city to perform the pūjās, and she prepares to take Vijayāmpāl with her. Pōrmaṇṇaṇ suggests that she do the pūjās on her own and leave the girl with him. But he finally contents himself with a plea that they finish the rites quickly and come back for the marriage (plate 23).

Let us note here that in the local variant described by trustees and other personnel of the Chinna Salem Draupadī temple, the female disguises are retained but with different identities and a shift in roles. Arjuna reactivates his eunuch disguise from the *Vir-āṭaparvan*, and Kṛṣṇa (referred to as Mahāviṣṇu) takes the form of Mohinī, the Enchantress. When they dance before Pōrmaṇṇaṇ, he becomes infatuated, not with the eunuch, but with Mohinī. It is then Arjuna who tells Pōrmaṇṇaṇ he must come to serve as the guardian of Draupadī's temple, making no mention of the pūjā articles. As suggested earlier, it is likely that the Terukkūttu versions represent the older current of these traditions, and that their innovations and complexities have given way to more familiar transformations in such local variants. Either way, however, Pōrmaṇṇaṇ is seduced into serving Draupadī by a hero assuming a form of the goddess, and is caught at his most lovelorn and dimwitted.

Kṛṣṇa now insists that he make a vow. According to the chapbook text, the old lady requires that if she and Vijayāmpāl do not return within three *nālīs* (about one and a half hours), Pōrmaṇṇaṇ must destroy his city, plough it to dust, make the earth even, and sow it with castor (*āmaṇukku*) and cotton (*parutti*); only then can he come looking for Vijayāmpāl (PMC, 27–28). Castor and cotton, scraggly and spindly bushes that grow in unirrigated soil, seem to be symbols of wasteland and devastation.¹³ In performance, Kṛṣṇa extracts a further promise, one to which I will very soon return;

13. In medieval Tamil literature, a victorious king will destroy a foe's city, plough his field with asses, and sow cotton and castor (personal communication, Pon Kothandaraman; source not recalled). To these two plants, the Tindivanam pūcāri's version adds a third, *erukku*: a coarse milky shrub, the charcoal of which is used for gunpowder and the flowers in garlands for Śiva, executed criminals, and the corpses of bachelors (Winslow [1862] 1979, s.v.). Castor alone is planted after the destruction of a palace in the *Elder Brothers Story* (Beck, n.d., 21) and after the destruction of a city in the *Epic of Palnāḍu* (Roghair 1982, 151–53, 225–27).

but for the moment let me retain something of the surprise that greeted me as I moved from my textual studies and field inquiries to the revelations of the actual drama. Having uttered at least the first group of his incredibly stupid vows, the lovestruck Pōrmannan watches forlornly as his intended disappears with the tottering old lady.

Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna now resume their own identities, rejoin the other Pāṇḍavas, and rejoice in their new possessions. Meanwhile, when Vijayāmpāl does not return to marry him, Pōrmannan looks about aghast and howls. Then—again following only the chapbook version—he destroys his fort, sows castor and cotton, and sets off for Nūtaṇāpuri. When he arrives with loud wails, Dharma sends for him. It is at this point that we come to the unexpected revelation of the performed version. When he comes before Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, Pōrmannan is holding in his right hand a wooden sword, and in his left a wadded up ball of white cloth. As he dances and poses with these, he brandishes the sword and dangles the bobbing wad (see plate 24). We have already seen (plate 6) that in the Terukkūttu, such balls of cloth are invariably heads. So Pōrmannan is very clearly posturing himself as an animated Pōrmannan-Pōttu Rāja icon of the most familiar type: his upraised right hand holding a sacrificial knife, his lowered left hand dangling a head. But whose head is this? Needless to repeat, it is not the head of Acalammācuran.

It turns out that in the performed versions of the play, Kṛṣṇa has made one more demand of Pōrmannan. Because Pōrmannan's father is such an ardent Śivabhakta, he would protest the release of the five pūjā implements and not allow his son to aid the Pāṇḍavas or come to the war. Kṛṣṇa has thus insisted that Pōrmannan bring his father's head when he comes to marry Vijayāmpāl. But who is Pōrmannan's father? To my consternation, in their second performance, the dramatists identified him as Gurulingam, and in their first as Śivalingam, making Gurulingam his grandfather. Śivalingam had cropped up once before, in the rather truncated accounts I had recorded in 1975 and 1977 at the Sowcarpet temple in Madras. There I was told that Pōttu Rāja (the name used rather than Pōrmannan) held the head of his father, Śivalingam, a "magician" (*mantravādi*) whom Kṛṣṇa had wanted killed along with other "magicians" to prevent their creating trouble for the Pāṇḍavas in the *Mahābhārata* war.¹⁴ Yet all of these answers must be placed beside the accounts of the Tindivanam pūcāri V. Govindas-

14. The informant painted the fescos shown in plates 16 and 27.

wamy, whose story, when I first heard it before reading or seeing *Pōrmannan Caṇṭai*, sounded strange indeed. What follows is the conclusion of the version he told me in 1981.

Pōrmannan destroys Śivānandapuri, sows the three plants [see n. 13], and comes for Vijayāmpāl. But Kṛṣṇa insists on one more trick [the pūcāri separated Kṛṣṇa's demands into two episodes]. Pōrmannan's father, Pōttu Rāja [sic], is a partisan of the Kauravas. He is doing penance in the ocean, where he stands up to his neck in water. As a result of this tapas, Śiva has granted him the boon of a Śivalingam on his head, making him unconquerable by the world's fourteen kings. Only his son can kill him. So Kṛṣṇa tells Pōrmannan to go cut off his father Pōttu Rāja's head. Pōrmannan does this and returns with the head in his hand. Seeing this Kṛṣṇa advises caution: "Don't put it on the ground. If it touches the ground, the whole world will be destroyed. As to marrying Vijayāmpāl, don't be hasty. While the *Mahābhārata* war is going on inside the fort, you stand at the fort entrance with the head in your hand. After the war we will see about the marriage." So Pōrmannan stands at the entrance to the fort just as he stands at the entrance to the temple, with his father Pōttu Rāja's head in his hand.¹⁵

This is our first reference to the *Mahābhārata* war taking place in a fort, a ritual-based notion that I must reserve for volume 2. As to the new identification of the paternal head in Pōrmannan's hand, let us just note that while Pōrmannan's father is no longer called Śivalingam—the most persistent of his names—the name reappears in the Śivalingam that Pōttu Rāja (alias Śivalingam) wears on his head. Further comment, however, must be left for later, as the play continues to unveil other riches.

15. Biardeau obtained an account from the same pūcāri in 1984 with the following variations. (1) As in the performed play, Pōrmannan destroys the fort and kills his father, Pōttu Rāja, in one go, without returning, but the demands are made by Arjuna-Vijayāmpāl rather than Kṛṣṇa. (2) It is on the way to Hāstinapura (sic), where Pōrmannan expects Vijayāmpāl to marry him, that Vijayāmpāl tricks Pōrmannan into yielding him his pūjā box, which has his "life" (*uyir*) in it. The "girl" asks to go off to urinate, keeping the box with her. Pōrmannan, distrustful, asks to hold an end of her saree. Arjuna ties the other end to a bush and goes to Hāstinapura, strewing banana leaves for Pōrmannan to find his way (another allusion to his confusion of desires, banana leaves being what one normally eats off; the play has him so hungry he will take "anyone as a wife"). (3) At Hāstinapura, Kṛṣṇa assuages Pōrmannan's anger by arranging for him to marry Caṇkuvati, whom he thinks is Vijayāmpāl until the wedding is complete! (4) After living with her for some time, Pōrmannan becomes the guardian of the gate of Hāstinapura (presumably, the fort).

Once Pōrmannan comes to Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇḍavas, having met all the conditions for his marriage to Vijayāmpāl, he has, of course, a rude surprise. Kṛṣṇa reveals to him that Vijayāmpāl and her mother were none other than Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa in disguise. Pōrmannan is dumbfounded, but soon undaunted: if they promised him a wife, he must get one. He is hungry, he will take anything: a remark that prompts some scatological humor from the Kaṭṭiyaṅkāraṇ. Kṛṣṇa then tells Dharma that the Pāṇḍavas should marry their sister Caṅkuvati to Pōrmannan. Through this alliance, they can make Pōrmannan their "army leader" or "commander of troops" (*paṭaittalaivan*; PMC, 33).

Immediately Dharma sends for Caṅkuvati, and when the curtain "lifts" again she appears, a large and strapping figure in flowered pink and purple saree wearing big round sunglasses and a wry smile. Pōrmannan is captivated—"nice sunglasses," he marvels—and agrees to the match, as does the bride.¹⁶ Kṛṣṇa then sets the last condition: Pōrmannan must serve as army leader to help the Pāṇḍavas win the eighteen-day war (PMC, 35).

In response, Pōrmannan finally makes his own demands. He will take part in the battle as army leader, and in accord with a heavenly pronouncement made to the goddess Earth, he will help make Dharma regain his crown. "But," he adds, "you must promise to give the things I require, O Tirumāl [Kṛṣṇa]: *poṅkal* like a mountain" [*malaip pōla poṅkal*], a flour lamp like a hill [*kuṇṇatu pōla viḷakkumāvu*], and a he-goat as tall as a palm tree [*paṇaimara' uyaram āṭṭukkittā*]. If you give me these things, I will do as you wish" (PMC, 35–36).

As observed in the Pakkiriṭṭalaiyam troupe's performances, the scene is played entirely for laughs. Kṛṣṇa orders the *poṅkal* (rice gruel) put on a mountain, the goat put on a palm tree, and the flour lamp put on a tamarind tree to make the objects as "big" as Pōrmannan requests.¹⁷ Chagrined, but satisfied, Pōrmannan con

16. Pōta Rāju's marital gullibility (cf. n. 15) seems to be taken in a different sense in the Gadaba mythology of East Godavari District, Andhra (Eisenhauer 1985, 35–36): his seven sisters marry him to one Peddintamma and then tell him, "Don't stay with her. She's an innocent." Some also call her his daughter. A temple of her own set apart from his implies they have no sexual relations. Curiously, she is called the daughter of "Maridi," a possible echo of "Mādrī," the mother of Caṅkuvati.

17. In the local Chinna Salem version, he asks only for the he-goat tall as a palmyra and rice like a mountain (*cātam malaip pōla*). Kṛṣṇa ties the goat to the top of a palmyra and has a banana leaf of rice set on top of a mountain. Pōttu Rāja, unable to marry Kṛṣṇa-Mohinī, agrees to marry Caṅkuvati, whose stone image stands beside his (a feature met in only one other place, at the Tiruppāṭirippuliyūr Railway Station temple in Cuddalore) in the main gopuram gateway of the Chinna Salem temple (see map 5).

tents himself with Caṅkuvati. Here, however, the chapbook version is for once more ritually informative than the performed. In the text, Kṛṣṇa grants the objects, no doubt implying similar tricks. But he says of the goat that he has given it for sacrifice (*kāvu*). Pōrmaṇṇaṇ should thus receive it as the blood sacrifice (*irattakāvu*, *irattapali*) that is offered before going to war. One is reminded of the pre-war sacrifice of Aravāṇ, which is sometimes ritually enacted in conjunction with actual or substitutional goat sacrifices (e.g., at Ālantūr; cf. Richards 1918, 115). Indeed, the chief trustee of the Draupadī temple in Sowcarpet, Madras, provided the unique testimony that the head in Pōttu Rāja's hand was none other than Aravāṇ's. It is also instructive to note that this episode is condensed in a pūcāri song that praises Pōrmaṇṇaṇ-Pōttu Rāja as the one "who argued with the shepherd [Kṛṣṇa] for the head of the goat" (*āṭṭut talaikkāka āyunaṭaṇ vātu ceytu*; NM, 16). Note that he is interested not so much in the goat as in its head, and recall that the head held by Pōttu Rāja in the Cunītaṇ cycle may be that of the "Protector of Goats" (see chap. 5, sec. B). It now appears that both cycles make connections between the goat and the head in Pōttu Rāja-Pōrmaṇṇaṇ's hand.

The most astonishing sacrificial interpretation of this scene, and unfolding of its implications, however, is that of the Nāṇavēl Terukkūttu troupe, as it performed the play at Maṅkaḷam in 1986. When Pōrmaṇṇaṇ asks for the goat as tall as a palmyra tree, Kṛṣṇa connives to give him a cock instead, held up high as if on a palm tree. Pōrmaṇṇaṇ, possessed, bites through the rooster's neck and immediately stuffs the neck into his mouth, drinking the blood and thus preventing it from touching the ground. And while the chorus sings of Nārāyaṇa, he keeps the neck in his mouth, holding the cock's carcass with his left hand and raising its severed head with his right until Kṛṣṇa comes to appease him. This Kṛṣṇa does by promising him Caṅkuvati, upon which Pōrmaṇṇaṇ flings both head and carcass at the smiling god's feet. Here again Kṛṣṇa—and the song to Nārāyaṇa—relieves a possession. But what is most striking is the acting out of an actual blood offering to Pōrmaṇṇaṇ in this Draupadī cult play, and the double substitution that this "sacrifice" entails. On the one hand, the cock itself is clearly a ritual substitute for the goat: the actors actually reveal that it was a goat that Pōrmaṇṇaṇ received in this way "in the *Mahābhārata*." And on the other, the cock's head in Pōrmaṇṇaṇ's hand is also a substitute—an iconic substitute rather than a ritual one—for the head of Pōrmaṇṇaṇ's father, for in this troupe's idiosyncratic version of

Pōrmaṇṇaṇ Caṇṭai, that episode, as if by compensation, is entirely omitted and indeed unknown.¹⁸

Finally, whatever its form, once Pōrmaṇṇaṇ has received this blood offering, the drama closes with the *Caṅkuvati Kaliyaṇam*, "The Marriage of Caṅkuvati" that provides the play's alternate title. In the chapbook version, Kṛṣṇa asks some Brahmans, led by one Varatāccāri, to conduct the rite. They consult their almanacs, find everything fit, and unite the couple (in performance, Kṛṣṇa places the tāli around Caṅkuvati's neck himself). At last the play ends with the Kaṭṭiyaṅkāraṇ's summation: "In this way, having given Dharma's sister Caṅkuvati to Pōrmaṇṇaṇ, and having made him first servant [*mutal cēvakaṇ*] and forerunner [*muṇṇoṭum piḷḷai*: literally, "the man who runs first"] of Pāñcāliyaṁmaṇ, they all went to their places" (PMC, 40).

B. Tamil and Telugu Variations in the Myths of Sister Goddesses

We have managed now to identify two overlapping but still relatively distinct myth cycles that, despite their different starting points, settings, and actors, can end up at the same place: with Pōttu Rāja–Pōrmaṇṇaṇ as Draupadī's "first servant" standing outside her temple, an undroppable head in his hand. Indeed, it is not only in their conclusions that these two cycles are complementary. They are isomorphic at other points as well. One can now appreciate, for instance, a number of similarities between "Pōrmaṇṇaṇ's Fight" and Brameesa Mudaliyar's version of the Cuniṭaṇ story. Like Pōrmaṇṇaṇ, Pōttu Rāja–Kalingarāja is a king rather than a Brahman. There is a journey to his kingdom, and the hint that it requires some tricks (Arjuna must catch his glance at the right moment and mention his devotion to Śiva) to bring him into Draupadī's service. And then there are the five implements. In such matters the pāratiyār's account would seem—despite his criticism of the Teruk-

18. Their version begins with a different prologue in which Pōrmaṇṇaṇ tells how the five implements came to him from Śiva. Pōrmaṇṇaṇ beat (but did not kill) his father, stopping his Śiva pūjās. Śiva thus came to kill Pōrmaṇṇaṇ, but his missiles were ineffective. Pōrmaṇṇaṇ asked Śiva why he deserved worship, and Śiva showed the five implements, with which he had decorated his chariot. Pōrmaṇṇaṇ requested these to take back to Śivānandapuri. Śiva agreed on condition that Pōrmaṇṇaṇ do his pūjās remaining unmarried, and giving up all desire for women. Should he desire to marry, his five things would vanish and his kingdom be destroyed. It is thus Śiva's requirements rather than Kṛṣṇa's that explain why Śivānandapuri is destroyed when Pōrmaṇṇaṇ lusts after Vijayāmpāl.

kūttu—to have the Pōrmaṇṇaṇ story as its source. Nor can one miss the more obvious parallel between Draupadī's severing the hundred (or thousand) heads of the demon and her demanding the hundred heads of the Kauravas.

But before we turn to further complementarities of these two Draupadī cult myths, let us first view them in the context of the wider mythology of Pōttu Rāja and the "village goddess." It is a subject about which we still know all too little. Its most revealing documentation has been provided only recently, in Gene H. Roghair's invaluable study of the *Epic of Palnāḍu* (1982).

It has been known for some time, primarily through the works of Oppert (1893, 461), Elmore (1915, 23, 85–88, 98–99), and Whitehead (1921, 18, 40), that Pōta Rāju serves a variety of village goddesses in Andhra Pradesh as guardian or "herald," much as we have seen him do for Draupadī. But with the exception of Elmore, these authors have told us precious little about Pōta Rāju's mythology, other than matters of caste and kinship. We have already noted Pōttu Rāja's ambiguous caste in Draupadī cult lore. In the Cuniṭaṇ cycle, he is sometimes a Brahman and sometimes a Kṣatriya, while as Pōrmaṇṇaṇ he is more clearly a Kṣatriya "king." At Kolar, however, the following story was recounted:

When Kṛṣṇa was about to die, he extracted the Pāṇḍavas' strength from them, and then, in order to see to it that Draupadī and the Pāṇḍavas were protected, he appointed Pōttu Rāja, the leader of a wild tribe of Rākṣasas, to look after them. Pōttu Rāja brought with him the *karakam* pot that is used in Draupadī festivals. And he married Caṅkotari [Caṅkuvati], the younger sister of Nakula and Sahadeva, who bore their son Allirāja [Allimuttu; see chap. 6].

One recognizes here a mixture of ingredients and transformations from our two main cycles, including the new setting in the *Mahābhārata* (cf. n. 11). But the current point of interest is that Pōttu Rāja is now a Rākṣasa "tribal." Oppert further informs us that in Andhra, Pōta Rāju "is considered to be the son of a Pariah, and in consequence [is] called *Caṇḍālaputra*," or "Son of an Outcaste" (Oppert 1893, 461). But this outcaste rank is certainly not uniform for Andhra Pradesh, as the *Epic of Palnāḍu* describes Pōta Rāju as a Brahman (Roghair 1982, 211). We have met such caste ambiguity in connection with Muttāl Rāvuttaṇ. On Pōta Rāju's multicaste identity, however, it must at least be said that it suggests for him a certain comensality with the Brahmarākṣasas.

As to kinship, though other tries have been cited, all of these authors have noted one predominant relationship: that Pōta Rāju

is most frequently regarded as the younger brother of the "seven sisters," the group that comprises different combinations of village goddesses (see chap. 10, n. 20).¹⁹ In the *Epic of Palnāḍu*, he is similarly the younger brother of Ankālamma and a hundred and one Śaktis (Roghair 1982, 195). In the Draupadī cult, Pörmannan's marriage to Caṅkuvati makes him Draupadī's brother-in-law, or more exactly, her husbands' younger sister's husband: a relationship that in the context of Tamil bilateral cross-cousin marriage still holds a younger brother implication.²⁰ But the ways the two myths account for these family ties have no narrative similarities (see Roghair 1982, 195; Elmore 1915, 85).

It is, however, in their full narrative developments that the two parallel Pöttu Rāja mythologies known to us have not only the most in common with each other, but with the Pörmannan cycle of the Draupadī cult. One is the Telugu mythology that links Pōta Rāju with Reṇukā, for which we have the version reported by Elmore and a variant recorded by Tapper.²¹ The other is the Telugu mythology recorded by Roghair linking Pōta Rāju with Ankālamma.

19. He is sometimes said to be the goddess's husband (Whitehead 1921, 18; *Manual of the Madras Presidency* (1873, 1: 355), perhaps reflecting the outraged Brāhmaṇi myth. In this vein, and echoing myths of the goddess and Mahiṣāsura, Herrenschmidt (1986, 379) notes a multiform of Pōta Rāju called Pampōtamma, who treats the goddess like a prostitute, demanding to spend the night with her in her temple, upon which she curses him to become a stone: henceforth she receives buffalo sacrifices, he coconuts. Beck (1981, 122), however, records a case from Tamilnadu where he is her son; and the original Potrāj is the goddess's son in a Maharashtra myth (Vetschera 1978, 106–8).

20. Kṛṣṇa and Pörmannan are both *maittunans* to the Pāṇḍavas, the first as their wife's brother (which he is to both Subhadrā and Draupadī), and the latter as sister's husband. Neither would thus be marriageable to Draupadī, but if Pörmannan had a sister, she could marry the Pāṇḍavas. Thus Draupadī would treat Pörmannan as a younger brother. My thanks to Pon Kothandaraman for clarifying these matters. Cf. also Trautman 1981, 311: "It will often be the case . . . that the sister's husband will also be the wife's brother."

21. I thank Bruce Tapper for making this version, gathered in Visakhapatnam District between 1970 and 1972, available to me. Herrenschmidt (1981, 158 n. 19; 1986, 161, 379) also gathered material—apparently rather fragmented—on Pōta Rāju's mythology in Visakhapatnam Dt. There may also be faint echoes of a related mythology in Maharashtra accounts of how the original Potrāj Mātāṅga came to serve the goddess and obtain his whip (Vetschera 1978, 113–20, 142). He supplants one Telaṅga, seemingly a Telugu Potrāj (recall from chapter 5 above how Draupadī's Pöttu Rāja is linked to Andhra), whom the goddess had tested, requiring him to go to a cobra-guarded palm tree, bring her water from "the middle floor," a pun on "the middle of the palm tree," and to place it on his eyelids. Telaṅga is dumbfounded, but Mātāṅga passes the tests, and the goddess makes his whip out of the cobra.

Moreover, in the latter case we will also profit from addressing the relationship between this Telugu (or more specifically Palnad) mythology of Ankāḷamma that involves Pōta Rāju,²² and the largely Tamil mythologies of Ankāḷamman, now richly documented by Meyer (1981, 1984), in which Pōttu Rāja has no place at all. For although the Tamil Ankāḷamman myths lack Pōttu Rāja, they have an obvious alternate figure. And in wider terms they bear a clear and most revealing narrative kinship to the myths that relate Draupadī to Pōttu Rāja-Pōrmanṇan in the common Gingee core area that the cults of these two “sisters” share. In fact, all of these mythologies, as ensembles, present parallels that illumine the Draupadī cult’s specific interpretation of the link between Pōttu Rāja, the goddess, and war. We know from an early fifteenth-century text cited by Roghair (1982, 81) that Pōtulayya (Pōta Rāju) was already revered at that time as the “battle companion” of the heroes of Palnāḍu, and we have heard from Brameesa Mudaliyar that Pōttu Rāja comes to Gingee from “Kalinga,” that is, from northern coastal Andhra. Let us now probe the implication that he has brought some of his Telugu mythology with him.

Elmore’s account linking Pōta Rāju with Reṇukā was recorded between 1900 and 1911 at Pokuru village near Kondakur in present-day Prakasam District, Andhra Pradesh, about two hundred and thirty kilometers north of Madras. It was recited at festivals of the goddess Usuramma (Elmore 1915, 33–37), though unfortunately Elmore does not say when this was done in the rather interesting five-day ceremony, or what if any relation there was between Usuramma and Reṇukā. In its broad outlines, it has affinities with the account gathered by Tapper (1971) in Visakhapatnam District, a good four hundred kilometers further up the Andhra coast in the very district Brameesa Mudaliyar identified with Kalinga, the original kingdom of Pōttu Rāja. But in Tapper’s account, the classical names have been replaced, most notably that of the goddess, who is called Yellamā Devi (or Ellammā) rather than Reṇukā. In chapter 12, we met Ellammā in the form of a young girl betrothed to Arjuna at the conclusion of his tapas. But in Andhra, Ellammā is Reṇukā’s village goddess name, just as in Tamilnadu Reṇukā is often identified with Māriyamman (see Whitehead 1921, 116). I turn first to Elmore’s account, the more Sanskritic of the two.

The myth is woven around a version of the classical story of Reṇukā’s beheading, at her husband Jamadagni’s command, by

22. Meyer, citing Chandra Sekhar (1961c, 181), suggests Pōta Rāju is connected with Ankāḷamma elsewhere in Andhra as well (personal communication).

their son Paraśurāma, the *avatāra* of Viṣṇu (see Biardeau 1969; Brubaker 1977; Shulman 1985, 110–29).²³

When her father Dhandagiri Razu's kingdom is beset by Rākṣasas, the sage Nārada [presumably an emissary of Viṣṇu] comes and tells the king that Reṇukā should undertake the fight against them. The king refuses, is defeated, and hides in a cave. Reṇukā learns of his plight in a vision and determines to avenge him. But on the way to ask permission from her husband, the great sage Jamadagni, she laughs in delight at the sight of a child. This disturbs Jamadagni's penance and is the pretext here for his irate command that Reṇukā be decapitated by their son Paraśurāma.

Let us recall the similarly dire repercussions of Draupadī's laughter in "Dice Match and Disrobing." Whereas the Draupadī cult only accentuates an epic precedent, the Reṇukā cult myth here invents it.²⁴ In each case, as with Durgā, the goddess's laughter is a prelude to her violent transformation.

Brought back to life by Jamadagni at Paraśurāma's demand, Reṇukā angrily displays her terrible form to her husband and then sets out on a mission to destroy the Rākṣasas who have overrun her father's kingdom:

She slew large numbers of them, but for every drop of their blood which fell to the ground sixty thousand new Rakshasas arose. Under such conditions victory was impossible. Renuka now thought of her brother, Potu Razu, who immediately stood before her. "My brother," she said, "if you will help me in this trouble I will see to it that you receive sheep as tall as the sky and a pile of rice as high as a palm tree." [When her brother agreed, Renuka then] directed him to spread his tongue over the ground as far as the kingdom of the Rakshasas extended, and not to let one drop of their blood fall to the ground. (Elmore 1915, 82–86)

The Rākṣasas are overcome by Pōta Rāju's rākṣasic feat. One is reminded of Pōttu Rāja's demon origins in the Draupadī cult story from Kolar.

23. Shulman (1985, 122) describes a Reṇukā shrine in Kanchipuram, linked with the great Śiva temples there, at which she is served by Potarācaṇ (Pōttu Rāja) and "grants low-caste people their desires in the Kaliyuga."

24. Reṇukā usually draws her spouse's ire when he sees by her loss of some power that she has had an unchaste thought (Brubaker 1977; Shulman 1985, 121).

In Tapper's version, Ellammā's parents are Pōta Rāju (not our main figure by this name) and Pārvatī Devī. Ellammā has married and is living at a place called Sachindrapatnam, while her husband, Jansukamahārāju (apparently a garbled transformation of Jamadagni) does a lengthy penance with a crore of *saṃnyāsis*. Though she does not know it, her parents lose their kingdom in war and gambling to the Pattabhi kings. Indeed, the father even gambles away the mother as his last stake, and receives her back only in humiliation: an echo, as Tapper notes in his margins, of the *Mahābhārata*.

Exiled in the mountains, without food or clothing, they give birth to Rāgi Pōta Rāju ["Copper Pōta Rāju," our main character] from the tears which well from the father's eyes and are caught in the mother's cupped hands. This Pōta Rāju is born famished, and his parents tell him only his older sister can satisfy his hunger. So he goes to Ellammā, and refuses to tell her of their parents' miserable plight until she feeds him "seven carts of mutton and seven tons of flour." She makes the food with "lots of rice." Pōta Rāju insists that she keep the cooking water, and digs a pit for it large enough to hold an elephant. When the food is done he makes it into three balls. When he eats the first, he drinks up the cooking water. When he eats the second, he drinks up what remains of the water mixed with mud. And when he eats the third, he drinks only mud.

When at last Ellammā hears about her parents' lot, she decides to avenge them. Neighboring women, however, tell her she must get her husband's permission. At first she cannot tell where her husband lives among the crore of *saṃnyāsis*, but when the wind blows out the lights in all but one of their houses, she knows it is his. She goes to Jansukamahārāju, asks his permission, and promises to return next morning. He asks how she can defeat the kings when her father, a great warrior, has failed. She tells him to look away if he wants to see her power, and when he turns around she appears to him as a tiger. He faints, she awakens him, and obtains his blessing and a boon. Then with the help of Pōta Rāju, who spies out the fort of the Pattabhi kings by taking the form of a fly and drives the horse for her war chariot, Ellammā defeats her foes and returns the kingdom to her parents. (Tapper 1971)

Kings replace Rākṣasas and Pōta Rāju gets his rice and mutton early rather than late. But enough elements are similar or identi-

cal—the exiled royal parents, the permission from the husband, the revelation of the goddess's fierce form—to assure us that we have variants of one myth. One notes, of course, that this second account dilutes the classical Reṇukā mythology: not only in the names, but in the absence of the matricide theme. Indeed, so far Ellammā has no son at all for her husband to order to kill her. But she does have one soon enough, on her victorious return from battle. The remainder of the story seems to transpose the matricide theme of Paraśurāma and Reṇukā into a sequel in which both mother and son make repeated efforts to kill each other.

Far closer to the mythology of Pörmannan, however, is the myth linking Pöta Rāju with Ankāamma in the *Epic of Palnāḍu*, the folk epic of a hero cult centered in the Palnad Taluk of Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh, between the locations of the two Reṇukā myths and about three hundred and seventy-five kilometers north of Madras. The following is a summary of Roghair's condensation of a bardic account. Most significantly, the context for its recitation is the night after the ceremonies of the first day of five in the Festival of the Heroes of Palnāḍu: ceremonies that include the sacrifice of a ram to Pöta Rāju and of a young bull buffalo, apparently to Ankāamma (Roghair 1982, 27, 213).

Śiva rules, in a time now past, from the Śivanandi Fort. Its four sides are protected by a Clutching Banyan, a Bramble, the thousand tongued Ādiśeṣa, and a river of fire. When Śiva departs for Mount Kailāsa, he leaves twelve "matchless warriors" to guard it, plus the Brahman Pöta Rāju. Some time after, a prince and princess who, while still children, wish to fulfill their dream of marrying each other, are fleeing from their relatives. The girl has stolen the chest of Ankālaparamēśvarī (Ankāamma), which her father had used for the goddess's pūjās. It contains the heroes' swords, wooden sandals, ash pots, rice, and Śivalingas: all cultic objects.²⁵ The couple carries it with them, hides it in a banyan, and the girl keeps their pursuers at bay by wielding Ankālaparamēśvarī's disease-spreading sword until the twelve matchless warriors find them and invite them to become the Rājus (kings) of the fort. They apparently bring Ankālaparamēśvarī's chest in with them. Inside, Pöta Rāju marries them.

The pursuers, Rājus of Kalyāṇ, now lay siege to the fort, and every day Pöta Rāju and the hundred and one Śaktis go

25. See Roghair 1982, 215 n. 17, citing Thurston and Rangachari 1904, 2: 292–95, which includes traditions of a similar chest worshipped among Gollas.

outside to beg them for alms. One day the Rājus tire of this, and decide to beat Pōta Rāju and pull out his Brahman's topknot. Perceiving his danger, Pōta Rāju offers to tell them how the fort may be entered if they will give him the compensation of "sixty bull buffalo, a he-goat, a great quantity of cooked rice, perfumed rice, sandalwood, a huge cartload of legumes, a cartload of greens, and a well of water." The Rājus supply all this. Then he takes three of them to the "battle well" and draws up a copper plate inscription which reveals that the fort can only be taken by Viṣṇu incarnate, Brahma Nāyuḍu. The Rājus recall an incident when they had once offended Brahma Nāyuḍu, but decide to seek his aid anyway. Brahma Nāyuḍu bargains and agrees, and sets forth with the Rājus to the Śivanandi Fort.

Seeing them coming, Pōta Rāju runs up to block the path. He tells Brahma Nāyuḍu "to forget his stupid venture." Brahma Nāyuḍu laughs and threatens "to cut off the noses of Pōtarāju and his sisters. He warns Pōtarāju to forget his stupid opposition." Pōta Rāju then demands food, and Brahma Nāyuḍu orders some cold rice for him. Seeing how little it is, Pōta Rāju despairs: "sixteen tons of rice, a huge quantity of perfumed rice, sandalwood, a great pile of legumes, and a well of water" would not be enough for him. So Brahma Nāyuḍu uses the māyā of Viṣṇu to make the morsel grow—after Pōta Rāju has swallowed it—"as large as the Himatgiri Mountain." A similar trick transforms the ewer of water into an unending flow. Pōta Rāju then runs off and returns to try to scare Brahma Nāyuḍu away. Brahma Nāyuḍu threatens him again. Then Pōta Rāju agrees to give up the secret of the fort if Brahma Nāyuḍu will give him a billy goat as tall as a palmyra "with a crore of noses, a hundred tails, four thousand legs, two thousand ears, and two thousand horns," and a pile of rice the size of an alluvial deposit. Brahma Nāyuḍu sends for an ordinary billy goat. Pōta Rāju again swoons in despair, but Brahma Nāyuḍu "partially" satisfies him about the multiple parts (it is not clear how), and then, taking sacrificial rice, he enlarges the goat to the height of a palmyra tree. Then Brahma Nāyuḍu tells Pōta Rāju that "there will be a Pōtarāju everywhere . . . at the feast of the goddess, where buttermilk is churned, by the threshing floor, and where grain is stored. In all these places and more, there will always be a Pōtarāju."

They now all approach the Śivanandi Fort, but before entering they are joined by three Yādava Rājus and their

sister, whom Brahma Nāyūḍu permits to accompany them.²⁶ As they approach the fort, Pōta Rāju cries out their intent, and the young couple inside escapes into the serpent world, leaving their baby twins, a boy and girl, behind. Brahma Nāyūḍu then leads his followers past the fort's defenses. Finally inside, he takes up the baby twins (who are important in later developments), gives them their first solid food, and adopts them. Also inside the fort are various pūjā articles: different, except for the sandals, from the contents of Ankālaparamēśvarī's chest. These are taken outside the fort and divided up between the Yādavas (herders) and Brahma Nāyūḍu, who represents the warrior-cultivator Velamas. Indeed, more to the point, both groups secure these items for the festivals of the heroes celebrated in their respective folk epics (see n. 26). Thus Brahma Nāyūḍu's spoils include the bards' "heroic" double drum (*vīraṇamu*) and the serpent pillar that in the *Epic of Palnāḍu* stands in the capital of the kings for whom the Velama heroes will fight in the great battle of Kārempūḍi.²⁷

Finally, as to the Tamil mythology of Aṅkālammaṅ, the situation is extremely varied. But in certain important regards it is highly reminiscent of what we find in the Draupadī cult. As already noted, both cults have the same Gingee core area. In that area, the Aṅkālammaṅ cult also has two essentially alternate myths that bear upon its central ritual, the "pillaging of the crematorium" (*may-āṇakkollai*). One myth, which we have already met in part, tells how Aṅkālammaṅ, disguised as an old fortune-teller, predicts the destruction of the fort of Vallālarājaṅ. The other is a version of the classical purāṇic myth of Śiva's severing of the fifth head of Brahmā.

26. These are important figures in another Telugu oral epic—the *Kāṭamarāju Katha*—in which the goddess Gangamma has an analogous role to that of Ankālamma in the *Epic of Palnāḍu* (see Roghair, 1982, 195, 198 n. 4, 215 n. 17; she is the same Ganga Bhavāni we met in chap. 13). An early fifteenth-century text also indicates that the heroes of Palnāḍu had Gangamma "as their patron goddess" (ibid., 81). The oldest of the three Yādava Rājus is Kāṭamarāju himself. Both folk epics are recited at the Pōta Rāju festival at Beeramgunta, Kovur Taluk, Nellore District, Andhra Pradesh (Chandra Sekhar 1961c, 44). Interactions between warrior-cultivator Velamas and herder Yādavas (or Gollas) in these Andhra cults would seem to parallel those between Vaṇṇiyars and Yādavas (or Kōṇārs) in the Draupadī cult.

27. Roghair 1982, 213–14. We are not told how some of the other spoils—the golden tasselled palanquin of Cennakēśvarasvāmi (Viṣṇu), Brahma Nāyūḍu's emerald dagger, and the sandals—are distributed, but the first two must go to Brahma Nāyūḍu. Cf. also ibid., 33, 72. An alternate account traces the serpent pillar to the Palnāḍu people's migration from their original northern home: it was brought with them tied to a *jammi* (śamī) tree (ibid., 162).

The two, as a pair, are striking for their parallels with the two mythologies connecting Draupadī with Pōttu Rāja-Pōrmannan. The first, with its fort entry, is clearly closest to the Pōrmannan myth, and like it, concerns itself only secondarily with a severed head. The second, which requires first Śiva and then the goddess to hold Brahmā's severed head, has at least this one fundamental affinity with the duties of Pōttu Rāja. For the present, however, it is the Vallālarājan myth that most concerns us. I distill only what is essential to this presentation from the variants gathered by Thurston and Rangachari (1906, 220–25) and by Meyer (1984, 12–14). But the main thread follows the version Meyer gathered at the cult's central temple of Mēl Malaiyanūr, Gingee Taluk, South Arcot.²⁸

Vallālarājan (or Vallālakaṇṭan), sonless (in Thurston's version, seeking a son capable of destroying everything in the universe), is one of four Rākṣasas (or Asuras) who tortures the gods on earth. Nārada, seeking to destroy them, convinces Vallālarājan to perform tapas to win the boon that Śiva will take birth as his son. Nārada then goes to Īśvarī (Śiva's wife) and convinces her to dress as an elderly fortune-teller and go to Vallālarājan's fort with her dire predictions. Nārada then gives further directions, all of which she now follows.

When Vallālarājan hears her forecasts, he imprisons her (cf. *Turōpatai Kuravañci*, chap. 13, sec. C). When his queen comes due, Īśvarī sees to it that no midwife can be found. Escaping from prison, she creates her son Vīrabhadra as a small child and poses herself as a feeble and decrepit old midwife. The harried king then engages her services for the queen. (In one variant his ministers suspect such an old hag with a baby must be a witch, and run off, while the king remains undeterred [Meyer 1984, 197]; in another, when the queen comes due, Aṅkāḷamman arrives as a ninety-year-old woman in terrifying form with anklets, pampai drum, and a three-letter mantra that allows her to enter the otherwise impenetrable fort [ibid., 186]). The goddess insists that the queen be brought to the north side of the fort (the place of the crematorium). There, when the queen is laid down on her back, the goddess assumes her Viśvarūpam, her fierce "Universal Form" as Aṅkāḷamman, tears open the queen's

28. For details, cf. Meyer's account (1984, 12–14, 50–51, 126, 185–87, 197) with that of Thurston and Rangachari (1906, 220–25).

belly, puts the child in a winnowing fan, and wears the queen's intestines as a garland. When Vallālarājan "came running, he saw his fort and everything fall down and he felt very sad" (ibid., 14). Virabhadra then assumes his terrifying form, cuts off Vallālarājan's head, holds it in his hand (ibid., cf. 132), destroys the entire fort, and kills the other three Rākṣasas. "The whole town was then sacked and it was converted into a burning ground" (Thurston and Rangachari 1906, 221).

If we now set out the main common features of these four myths, the similarity of their overall structure will be apparent. In table 8, to round out the picture, I enclose in brackets certain themes that are known in the myth cycles of the deities in question, but that are not found in the specific myths now under consideration.

It should be clear that these four mythologies, taken as an ensemble, form part of a transformation set. Indeed, it is a set for which one must expect other entries. My purpose, however, is not to submit this ensemble to a structural study. Rather, I will be selective in my treatment of specific connectives (parallels, oppositions, substitutions, split themes) within the set and behind it: that is, the connectives that link these myths with the underlying and ever-intruding mythology of the goddess.

Let us take as our point of departure the Tamil mythologies of Draupadī and Aṅkāḷamman, which, as we have noted, spring from the same core area. Clearly they are homogeneous. They are the only pair within table 8 to generate correspondences at every one of our ten points. The correspondences are noticeable for two features. First of all, at certain points the parallels between the two mythologies are so precise as to require a regional explanation: perhaps mutual influences between the cults, or the reshaping of a regional Tamil folklore. The disguises in item 2, the imprisonments in item 3, the fivefold numerology of cultic paraphernalia in item 4, the overlooking of the age gap in item 5, and above all the fort destructions and head-holdings in item 6 all point in this direction. Indeed, when one recalls the disguises and prognostications of "Draupadī the Gypsy," one realizes that the affinities between the mythologies as totalities are even deeper.

An equally striking feature of their correspondences, however, is that once one is past item 7, it is no longer a question of parallel continuous narratives, but—in Aṅkāḷamman's case—of bracketed parallels from other Aṅkāḷamman myths (items 8, 9, and also item 4) or a thematically similar variant that is out of narrative sequence

Table 8. Telugu and Tamil Parallels of "Pōrmaṇṇan's Fight"

A. Draupadī and Pōrmaṇṇan	B. Reṇukā/Ellammā and Pōta Rāju	C. Ankālamma and Pōta Rāju	D. Ankālammaṇ and Vallālarājan
1. Pōrmaṇṇan is in charge of Śivānandapurī, a fort-city brought to life by Śiva.		Pōta Rāju and twelve matchless warriors are left by Śiva in charge of the Śivanandī Fort.	Vallālarājan rules an inaccessible fort; he seeks Śiva as his son.
2. Only Kṛṣṇa (Viṣṇu incarnate) knows how to enter this fort; he sends Bhīma the woodseller to ruin its wall; Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna then enter in the disguises of an old woman and a lovely girl.	Nārada (representing Viṣṇu) says Reṇukā should undertake her royal father's fight against the Rākṣasas (Elmore 1915).	Only Brahma Nāyudu (Viṣṇu incarnate) can enter the fort, passing Adīṣeṣa, the River of Fire, Clutching Banyan, and Bramble.	Nārada (representing Viṣṇu) tells Īśvarī to disguise herself as an old fortune teller to predict and instigate the fort's fall.
3. Imprisonment of Bhīma.			Imprisonment of the goddess.
4. Inside the fort are five pūjā articles belonging to Pōrmaṇṇan, and needed for Draupadī to win the Kurukṣetra war.		Inside the fort are various pūjā items, some associated with Ankālamma, goddess of the Kārempūḍi battlefield.	[Ankālammaṇ is born with five things, usually her forehead eye, trident, gem, mantra, and medicine, apparently for her cremation ground rituals (Meyer 1984, 6–8, 42–43)].
5. Pōrmaṇṇan's stupidity: he overlooks the age gap between the grandmother and Vijayāmpāl; he lets them take the pūjā items without leaving security; he agrees to ruin his fort and kill his father if they do not return, etc.	Pōta Rāju's stupidity: he drinks mud (Tapper 1971).	Pōta Rāju's stupidity: he willingly tells the Rājus they need Brahma Nāyudu's help to enter the fort. When Brahma Nāyudu comes, he tells Pōta Rāju to "forget his stupid opposition." He is the butt of Brahma Nāyudu's jokes.	Vallālarājan's stupidity: unlike his ministers, he overlooks the age gap between the old midwife and the baby Virabhadra.

6. Pōrmannaṇ holds his father's head; sows castor and cotton where the fort had been.
 7. Kṛṣṇa makes Pōrmaṇṇaṇ the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī's "army leader."
 8. In return, Pōrmaṇṇaṇ demands *poṇkal* (rice) like a mountain, a flour lamp like a hill, and a goat as tall as a palmyra. Kṛṣṇa supplies all with tricks.
 9. Kṛṣṇa guarantees that Pōrmaṇṇaṇ will guard all of Draupadī's temples.
 10. The five pūjā articles are made available to Draupadī so that she can be victorious at Kurukṣetra.
-
- Virabhadra holds Vallālarājan's head; turns his fort into a cremation ground.
- Virabhadra becomes Ankālamman's agent of destruction against the king and fort.
- [Pōtulaṃyaya as "battle companion" of the Palnad heroes in fifteenth-century text (Roghair 1982, 81)].
- Pōta Rāju says he will give up the secret to the fort for a miraculous billy-goat tail as a palmyra, and a huge rice mound. Brahma Nāyudu's *māyā* supplies these.
- Brahma Nāyudu guarantees that Pōta Rāju will be everywhere, including Ankālamma's feast.
- The various pūjā articles are divided among the Yādavas and Velamas so the latter at least can take part in the hero cult at Kārempūḍi.
- [In her incarnation as Reṇukā-Māriyamman, Ankālamman spreads smallpox until Lakṣmī promises a palmyra-high goat, a huge pot of gruel, and a flour lamp as big as Mount Tiruvannamalai. Viṣṇu's tricks supply these (Meyer 1984, 17–18)].
- [Virabhadra becomes one of Ankālamman's four guardian sons who protect her temples (Meyer 1984, 19)].
- Ankālamman, in a variant tradition, uses mantra, pampai, and anklets to enter Vallālarājan's fort with a view to its becoming a cremation ground.

(item 10). This suggests either that the Draupadī cult has brought together disparate themes or that the *Ankālammaṇ* cult has fractured and reapportioned the elements of what is elsewhere a coherent mythology, reinterpreting it. Clearly it is the latter alternative that commends itself, for the mythology the Tamil cult of *Ankālammaṇ* seems to fracture and reinterpret is one that the Tamil mythology of Draupadī shares in large measure with a Telugu mythology of *Ankālammaṇ*-*Ankāmma* herself.

If we now compare the Tamil *Ankālammaṇ* myth (column D) with the common elements of the Draupadī and Telugu (Palnad) *Ankāmma* myths (columns A and C), we can orient ourselves to the main issues that will preoccupy us for some time to come. First of all, let us note the relative prominence in the Draupadī and Palnad *Ankāmma* myths of Śiva and Viṣṇu.

As regards Śiva, there is especially the matter of his fort, which in the Tamil *Ankālammaṇ* myth has become the fort of *Vallālarājan*. It is true that its Tamil and Telugu names could mean two different things: "The City of the Bliss (*ānanda*) of Śiva" on the one hand, and "The Fort of Śiva's Nandi" on the other. But inasmuch as Nandi, the name of Śiva's bull, also means blissful or joyous, and as Nandi is never mentioned in connection with Śivanandi Fort, it is most likely that in both cases it is "City of the Bliss of Śiva." In any event, despite their different defenses (A2, C2), the two forts are clearly one. Roghair attempts to historicize the Śivanandi Fort, and for obscure reasons he refers to it as "an as yet unidentified fort in the central Deccan," "probably in Karnataka" (1982, 89, 146 n. 41). But it is most surely mythical. Indeed, one suspects that it is nothing but a "historicized" relocation of the mythology of Kāśī-Banaras. In fact, one version of the *Ankālammaṇ*-*Vallālarājan* myth makes *Vallālarājan* a king of Kāśī (Meyer 1984, 185). And in the *Elder Brothers Story*, when the heroine Tamarai must go to Banaras to perform penance to overcome her barrenness, she cannot do so without Viṣṇu, whose help (as in the two present stories) enables her first to cross the Himalayas, then four rivers (of stone, thorns, clarified butter, and fire), and finally a cobra forest. These defenses are strikingly similar (river of fire, Ādiśeṣa = cobras, Bramble = thorns) to those of the Śivanandi Fort (see Beck, n.d., 126-27, 140-41).

Viṣṇu's presence in the Draupadī and Palnad *Ankāmma* myths is worked out through his incarnations, Kṛṣṇa and Brahma Nāyudu, whereas in the Tamil *Ankālammaṇ* myth (and the Telugu *Reṇukā* myths) it is worked out more remotely through his trouble-

shooter Nārada. In the particular matter of the entry into the fort, the Tamil *Ankāḷamman* myth thus shifts the major emphasis from Viṣṇu to the goddess, who rather than merely providing Kṛṣṇa with a disguise (A2) enters the fort herself (D2, D10). Indeed, there is a tendency for *Ankāḷamman* to subsume other male roles as well. Like Bhīma, she allows herself to be imprisoned (item 3). And like Pōrmaṇṇaṇ and Pōta Rāju, she demands the goat, flour lamp, and gruel (item 8).

But the most telling difference between these mythologies is the absence of Pōttu Rāju from the Tamil cult of *Ankāḷamman*. The fracturing and reapportionment of his dossier is what characterizes her cult's reinterpretation of this mythological ensemble. As we have just seen, one of Pōta Rāju's most characteristic mythemes goes, most incongruously and belatedly (supposedly via *Reṇukā-Māriyamman*), to *Ankāḷamman*: his demand of the goat, flour lamp, and gruel. Similarly, in the one case the various *pūjā* items come from Pōrmaṇṇaṇ's or Pōta Rāju's fort; in the other they are born with *Ankāḷamman* (item 4). It is true, as we shall observe in chapter 17, that there are similar stories about Draupadī being born with her *pūjā* implements. But these myths still connect Draupadī with Pōttu Rāju. Indeed, the myths of *Ankāḷamman*'s five *pūjā* items not only do without Pōttu Rāju, but invert the outcome of "Pōrmaṇṇaṇ's Fight." For just as Kṛṣṇa's tricks bring the five items from "The City of the Bliss of Śiva" to the service of Draupadī, so his machinations persuade *Ankāḷamman* to give her five *pūjā* items to Śiva (Meyer 1984, 8, 42–44). Meanwhile, other elements of Pōta Rāju's mythology go to *Vallālarājan*, who rules the impenetrable fort that elsewhere belongs to Pōta Rāju or to Pōrmaṇṇaṇ's father, and who inherits Pōta Rāju's stupidity (items 1 and 5). Finally the destruction of the city, the holding of the head, and the guarding of the goddess are elements of Pōta Rāju's mythology that the *Ankāḷamman* cult ascribes to *Virabhadra* (items 6, 7, and 9).

This redistribution of Pōta Rāju's legacy in the Tamil mythology of *Ankāḷamman* is acute, though we shall find that as a process it is not without parallels in Draupadī cult mythology and ritual. But what is striking, and the point I will now pursue, is that in Tamilnadu it is the Draupadī cult rather than the *Ankāḷamman* cult that retains a version of the Pōta Rāju myth that in Andhra Pradesh is associated with *Ankāḷamma-Ankāḷamman* herself. Let me now propose a hypothesis to account for these transformations.

Meyer discusses a Telugu (Andhra) variant of the *Ankammā* (*Ankāḷamma*)–*Vallālarājan* myth that has certain noteworthy dif-

ferences from the Tamil accounts.²⁹ As Meyer observes, the Telugu myth links Ankammā with royal lineages and lands. Indeed, she is the Kuladeva of a royal family known as the Mārācirājulu, and when she leads their clan to battle, she benefits by their increase in territory. All this contrasts with the Tamil *Ankāḷammaṇ*, who is a Kuladeva, but not a landed one. More particularly, she is primarily—and especially in the core area of her cult (Meyer 1984, 86)—the Kuladeva of the essentially unlanded Cempaṭavar inland fishermen (cf. chap. 13, sec. C). This distinction seems to point toward a solution to the presence or absence of Pōta Rāju in these different cults.

It is not clear from Meyer's brief description of the Telugu Ankammā myth whether the goddess has in this case any connection with Pōta Rāju. Before she cuts open the pregnant queen, however, the old fortune-teller midwife—that is, Ankammā—makes the queen promise her “many buffaloes for ploughing the fields” (Meyer 1984; 191). The Tamil *Ankāḷammaṇ* makes no such demands for buffaloes, and I suspect that this is because her rituals do not include buffalo sacrifices, as those of Ankammā, a royal Kuladevī, no doubt would.

This inference can, in any case, be confirmed in the Palnad cult of *Ankāḷamma*. It will be recalled that in the Palnad myth Pōta Rāju asks not only for his usual fare of rice and goats, but for “sixty bull buffalo” (Roghair 1982, 211). Significantly, he makes this demand, not of the goddess or an avatar of Viṣṇu (as he does in other instances where his demands are more limited; see table 8, 8B and 8C), but of the Rājus of Kalyāṇ. It would seem that where the myths account for his coming into the goddess's service, he demands for himself only the goat and the rice. But his mythical dealings with kings, like those of the Telugu Ankammā with the pregnant queen, provide a reminder that the royal role in the sacrifices in which Pōta Rāju serves the village goddess—a role that will be fulfilled not by actual kings but by village headmen or leaders of a locally dominant caste—is to supply the buffalo as *the goddess's* main sacrificial victim. The Draupadī cult is like the Tamil *Ankāḷammaṇ* cult in having no buffalo sacrifices. But unlike the latter, it retains—or better, imports—Pōttu Rāja because Draupadī is above all the Kuladevī of a landed dominant farmer caste, the *Vaṇṇiyars*, who link themselves not only with the Pāṇḍavas but with the regional mythology and history of the kingdom of Gingee.

29. Meyer (1984, 191–92), citing a 1983 lecture at Heidelberg by M. L. K. Murty, Department of Archaeology, Pune University, Deccan College. The myth's location is not given.

Turning now to the three mythologies that do involve Pōta Rāju, it is clear that, in the broadest terms, they each account for the origins of Pōta Rāju's ritual service to the goddess against the background of a great mythic battle. Indeed, one should note that Pōta Rāju's consistent connections with the battlefield in these three mythologies point to another dimension of his absence from the Tamil Aṅkālammaṇ cult, in which the cultic and mythic setting is not the war-field—venue of Durgā—but the crematorium. In each of the three cases, the battle will in some sense be fought by or on behalf of the goddess, and in each case there would seem to be an instigating role for Viṣṇu (item 2). Not only does Viṣṇu (or a surrogate) provoke the war; in effect, he brings Pōta Rāju (or Pōrmaṇṇaṇ) and the goddess together. Proceeding from this point, let us attend to those details in the two Telugu mythologies that confirm a relation between Pōta Rāju as Buffalo King and the cult of the buffalo sacrifice. For that is one of the primary directions in which this discussion of the Draupadī-Pōrmaṇṇaṇ myths will continue.

Most intriguing is the detail in Elmore's Reṇukā myth concerning Pōta Rāju's tongue, which he uses to lap up the blood of the Rākṣasas for Reṇukā. This brings to mind the portrayal of Pōrmaṇṇaṇ by R. S. Mayakrishnan, who keeps sticking out his tongue to display his raucous character and his lust for Vijayāmpāl in *Pōrmaṇṇaṇ Caṇṭai*. On the one hand, the extended tongue lapping up the blood of the demons must draw its inspiration from *Devī Māhātmyam* 8.56–61, where Kālī—often shown iconographically with protruding tongue—drinks Raktabīja's blood drops to prevent them from reproducing new demons (cf. chap. 13, sec. B). On the other, there seems to be an evocation of the large and lolling tongue of the buffalo (cf. Biardeau, in press, making the same two points). It is thus not surprising for Pōrmaṇṇaṇ to have a large tongue, or for Pōta Rāju to replace Kālī in handling the most extreme impurity of a mythic sacrificial killing. In the Pōrmaṇṇaṇ cycle, the tongue points inevitably to our hero's incredible appetite, which I will return to in a moment. For Reṇukā, Pōta Rāju prevents the demon's regeneration by drinking his blood; for Draupadī, he normally achieves the same result—usually not as Pōrmaṇṇaṇ, however, but as Pōttu Rāja in the Cunītaṇ-Acalammaṇ cycle—by holding the demon's head. But as we have also observed, the Draupadī cult generates its own exceptions that are closer to the wider patterns. Pōrmaṇṇaṇ may hold the neck of a rooster in his mouth in a fashion that prevents its blood from falling. Or in a seemingly eccentric “popular” and non-pāratīyār version of the killing of Acalammaṇ,

it was even told that while Pōttu Rāja holds Acalamman's last head, Draupadī drinks the blood herself from the demon's body (see chap. 13, n. 23). The pieces of the myth are thus susceptible to different combinations and constructions. In another multiform of the Raktabīja myth, the Andhra village goddess Peddamma catches all the Rākṣasas' blood drops but one, which turns into Dundubhi, another classical name for the Buffalo Demon (see Hildebeitel 1980a, 200–11), whom she must then slay in a more conventional manner (Oppert 1893, 472–74; Elmore 1915, 122). Here the buffalo emerges from the one drop that escapes the tongue.

It is a similar situation with Pōta Rāju's stupidity, which comes out in every group of myths (see table 8, item 5). It is certainly tied in with the proverbial stupidity of the buffalo (Elmore 1915, 125; Brubaker 1978, 341; Biardeau, in press), a trait that also finds expression in the name *tūṅkumūrci maram*—"sleepy fellow" or "stupid fellow tree"—for the tree beside which the first buffalo is sacrificed at the Gingee Fort (see chap. 4, sec. B). Thus Pōrmanṇan (à la Mayakrishnan) rushes wildly about like a water buffalo run amok, his shrieks and howls the bellowing of the beast. Like the dimwitted buffalo, he falls for trick after trick—the perfect foil for Kṛṣṇa (or Brahma Nāyudu)—doing one dumb thing after another.

Pōta Rāju's insatiable appetite also recalls that of the buffalo and lies behind his recurrent demands—found in all the myths (item 6)—for the mammoth goat and the mountain of rice. These in turn are connected with the role of Pōta Rāju in the buffalo sacrifice to the village goddess. As Elmore comments, their appearance in the Reṇukā story "is the explanation of the offering of a sheep and a pile of rice to Potu Razu wherever the village deity is worshipped" (1915, 86). This holds true not only for areas of coastal Andhra Pradesh where Pōta Rāju is represented by a post or, more rarely, by an icon; it also holds—at least with regard to the goat—for a rite found more widely in Andhra, Karnataka, and Maharashtra where he is impersonated by an outcaste known as Potrāj (still "Buffalo King"), whose role it is to sacrifice a goat, usually prior to the buffalo sacrifice, by biting into its jugular vein.³⁰ This rite, preceding a buffalo sacrifice, occurs on the day of special festivities concerning Pōta Rāju in the festival of the Palnad heroes at Kārem-pūḍi, with the ritual performed by an outcaste Māla who is also an epic bard (Roghair 1982, 27). A similar rite was described to me

30. See especially Elliott 1860a, 3: 429–31, a remarkable account of a first attempt by a young Potrāj called upon to replace his toothless older brother, summarized in Hildebeitel 1985c, 177. Cf. also Oppert 1893, 461, 471, 476; Artal 1907, 462; Fawcett 1890, 266, 274; Enthoven 1922, 2: 81; Chandra Sekhar 1961b, 178; 1961d, 7.

at one of the two Draupadī temples in Kolar (Kolar District, Karnataka), where a post-firewalk ceremony honoring Pōttu Rāja provides the occasion for a man—the very one who supplied the story of Pōttu Rāja's identity as a Rākṣasa—to impersonate him by biting the neck of a goat so that the blood drips into a plate of rice that is then offered to Pōttu Rāja's icon.³¹ Here one has the goat and the rice together.

At Draupadī temples in Tamilnadu, I have found no such local specialists under the name Potraj, or any equivalent. But as we have seen, the ritual gesture of biting the goat at the jugular has left at least one faint imprint upon the Terukkūttu. In the Nāṇavēl troupe's interpretation of "Pōrmannan's Fight," Pōrmannan bites into the neck of a cock in the same fashion that he is said to have tucked into a goat in the *Mahābhārata*. In this fashion, what is a local village tradition in Andhra and Karnataka may make its rounds from village to village in the itinerant drama, and in a district of Tamilnadu—North Arcot—predictably near to the Karnataka and Andhra borders. Let me propose that although this rite surely has its horrific side, it is a reenactment of a killing by a beast of prey,³² repeating the way in which the goddess's lion or tiger attacks the Buffalo Demon, and recalling the "tiger-dog" symbolism of the *vāghyās* in the cult of Khaṇḍobā (see chap. 6, sec. C). The Nāṇavēl troupe refers to Pōttu Rāja as *pulimukha*, "tiger-mouthed." Similarly, one description of the Potraj's role in a Kanarese village buffalo sacrifice offers a striking evocation of his buffalo-to-tiger transformation: "A lamb is set free on the square. A member of the [out-caste] Holeyas called Potu-rājū or buffalo king, strips himself naked, ties a few neem leaves around his loins, comes running like a tiger, pounces on the lamb and carries it away toward the village boundary" (Jayakar 1980, 28). Let us not forget that these are all images that link possession with bhakti. Moreover, there are reasons to suspect that the horrific bearing of the Potraj is a means to silence and still the animal before its neck is bitten (cf. Hildebeitel 1985c, 177), a purpose that may ultimately derive from the various "pacifications" of the sacrificial animal in Vedic ritual.

The Tamil Draupadī cult would thus seem to connect its Pōttu Rāja with "the goat and the rice," and the related gestures of the Potraj, only through his Pōrmannan alter ego. But one can still find a Tamil cult that links Pōttu Rāja with the goat and rice outside

31. A fieldwork novice in March 1975, I did not ask about his caste, but the role he plays is inherited.

32. I thank my sister Jane Gould for this insight.

the Draupadī cult. At Maṅkaḷam (Tiruvannamalai Taluk, North Arcot), a three-day festival for Pōttu Rāja (Pōtturājacāmi) is held annually in the month of Māci (February-March). According to local informants, the festival was 149 years old in 1982 and is the only Pōttu Rāja festival in Tamilnadu. It is, in any case, the only one listed in the Tamilnadu *Fairs and Festivals* volume of the 1961 census (Nambiar, Karup, et al. 1968, 237), whereas seven Pōta Rāju festivals or temples—mostly in the southern Andhra districts of Chittoor (bordering North Arcot) and Nellore—are described in the corresponding volumes for Andhra Pradesh (Chandra Sekhar 1961b, 79; 1961c, 21, 164–65; 1961d, 22, 23, 121; 1961e, 54–55).

There are two Draupadī temples in Maṅkaḷam village. Caste and lineage affiliation are especially marked at these temples, as can be discerned from the fact that each is controlled by a rival party of Vanniya_rs whose split in about 1975 led to the construction of the “new temple,” and then to an agreement that the two temples would alternate in sponsoring the village’s Draupadī festival from year to year. Though each temple has its typical Pōttu Rāja icons, neither temple has any connection with the Pōttu Rāja festival. This festival also ignores the more caste-defined Draupadī and involves instead Pōttu Rāja’s connection with three “village” goddesses: Nelliya_mmaṇ, Kāḷiya_mmaṇ, and Māriya_mmaṇ.

The rice and the goat are the main focus of the rituals of the Pōttu Rāja festival’s last two days. Outside the Kāḷiya_mmaṇ temple around 10 P.M. on the second night, a wooden processional image of Pōttu Rāja is placed on a “chariot” (actually a bullock cart) facing images of the three goddesses. A procession consisting of a *śakti-karakam* (a flower-coned pot borne on the head), a dummy horse dance (*poykāl kutirai āṭṭam*), anklet dance (*celampāṭṭam*: dancers wear the anklet-rattle, or *cilampu*, that is associated with many rural goddesses), the beating of the pampai drum, and a good deal of boisterousness leads this ensemble to the corrugated tin shed within the village that houses an imposing wooden image of Pōttu Rāja. The image stands about fifteen feet high, with sword in one hand and lion in the other, on a much larger “chariot” of his own. Directly before the giant red-faced figure, a huge mound—about four feet high—of rice intermixed with all manner of curries, sambar, and puddings has been amassed from private kitchens (see plate 25). When the procession reaches this mound at about 2 A.M., the food is offered to Pōttu Rāja and then distributed as prasādam to the considerable crowd that has collected. It is especially sought by women who want to become pregnant. On the third and final day of the festival, the huge image of Pōttu Rāja is drawn through the

streets of the village on its chariot and goats are sacrificed to him by Vanniyars at crossroads and house entrances, and by Harijans at a special pandal or shed. In contrast, during the annual Draupadī festival in this village, which occurs in the month of Cittirai (April-May), no goats or rice are offered to Pōttu Rāja at any point, though it is at Maṅkaḷam, as we have seen, that Pōrmannan may be offered a rooster in his drama. Nor does the Draupadī festival make any use of the large Pōttu Rāja image there, which remains locked in its shed.

As I have insisted in discussing Pōttu Rāja and Muttāl Rāvuttan, Draupadī's Pōttu Rāja receives only mythical or symbolic blood sacrifices. Where the wider cultic and mythic gestures that link Pōta Rāju with actual sacrifices enter into the Draupadī cult, they do so not in connection with Pōttu Rāja directly, but only indirectly, and rather exceptionally, through his dramatized *Mahābhārata* mythology as Pōrmannan. It would be wrong, however, to conclude that the type of goat and rice offerings made elsewhere to Pōta Rāju have only this one Draupadī cult outlet. Let us recall from chapter 8 that in certain temples, very similar rites are offered in connection with the dramatized ritual enactments of the killing of Baka, the ancestor of the Brahmarākṣasic Acalammācuran whose head Pōttu Rāja—no less Brahman than Rākṣasa himself—holds on behalf of Draupadī and the kingdom of Gingee. What is most intriguing is that while the Draupadī cult in Tamilnadu persists in relieving Pōttu Rāja of his traditional associations with real blood sacrifices, it has not hesitated to transpose this type of ceremony directly onto a ritually enacted episode from the *Mahābhārata*: one that, as we have seen, also evokes a village buffalo sacrifice, and that is the province not of the itinerant drama but of actors local to festival-performing villages. Beyond actual ritual, however, and in terms of myth, it is still the transposition of Pōta Rāju's wider ritual complex onto his *nom de guerre*, Pōrmannan, that holds the greatest treasures. As we return to "Pōrmannan's Fight," we must now look more carefully at the myth that transforms the Draupadī cult version of the *Mahābhārata* sacrifice of battle into the ritual and mythological idioms of Pōttu Rāja, the Buffalo King.

17 Pōrmannan's Fight: The War King's Weapons and Their Mythical Sources

Now that we have seen what the Draupadī-Pōrmannan myth has in common with myths from the cults of other South Indian goddesses, we are in a position to appreciate the features that are distinctively its own: that is, those that have no exact or close parallels in the other myths or myth cycles. It is here above all that we can glimpse the creativity of the Draupadī cult, and in particular of its traditions centered in the Terukkūttu, in mythmaking with the *Mahābhārata*. The new details, those "original" to the Draupadī cult (or more precisely, those unique within our working set of related myths), are as follows: Bhīma's disguise as a woodseller; Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa's female disguises; Pōrmannan's lust for Vijayāmpāl; his destruction of his own fort; the beheading of his father; and his marriage to Caṅkuvati. The Bhīma episodes aside, it will be my first contention that the rest of these innovations clarify themselves as adroit and vivid transformations of the mythology of the goddess and the Buffalo Demon.

A. Human Heads and Buffalo Tales

Let us begin with the point that is most striking from our summary of the play. Arjuna's appearance as Vijayāmpāl is a thinly veiled evocation of Durgā-Vijayā. Pōrmannan, alter ego of the Buffalo King, is thus caught in one of the perennial and most diversified themes of the mythology of the Buffalo Demon: he wants to marry the goddess. His crude advances and unbounded lust are comic renditions of the purāṇic scene in which Mahiṣa, or one of his surrogates, demands Durgā as his consort.¹ Likewise, Arjuna's seductive pose as

1. See chapters 4 and 13 on Bhīma and Draupadī's collaboration in the killing of Kicaka as a multiform of this theme. Further, see especially Marglin 1985, 214–15: an Orissan variant in which, because the gods curse Mahiṣa that his death will result from seeing a woman's vagina, Durgā must allow him to see hers before she

Vijayāmpāl is a reworking of Durgā's role as femme fatale. When Durgā lures Maḥiṣāsura to his doom, saying he must conquer her in battle before she will marry him, she is the goddess disguising the fact that she is a warrior. And when Arjuna entices Pōrmaṇṇaṇ to give up the five instruments of his power, he is a warrior disguised as the goddess.² Both Pōrmaṇṇaṇ and Maḥiṣāsura are too impassioned and stupid to recognize that they are dealing with the warrior goddess, or the goddess warrior. In either case, they confront an utterly impossible—indeed “inaccessible”—sexual partner, and fall victim to “her” deceptions.

Yet Pōrmaṇṇaṇ's cravings for Arjuna the “warrior goddess” are but a prelude to his service to Draupadī and his marriage to Caṅkuvati. Indeed, Durgā's enticement of Maḥiṣa forms a mythological background that subtly underscores Pōrmaṇṇaṇ's indelible primary identity before his story continues to reveal how he—Pōrmaṇṇaṇ alias Maḥiṣāsura—and his relation to the goddess have been changed. Thus the real warrior goddess Pōrmaṇṇaṇ will serve is Draupadī, for whom Arjuna is but a double (one will recall that it is Vijayāmpāl who first receives Pōrmaṇṇaṇ's implements on Draupadī's behalf, not Kṛṣṇa the old lady; see plate 23).³ Pōrmaṇṇaṇ's marriage to Caṅkuvati resolves the theme of his misdirected and potentially self-destructive lust for the goddess, leaving no danger that it will be turned toward Draupadī as it was toward Arjuna-Vijayāmpāl. As the younger sister of the Pāṇḍava twins and daughter of Mādri, Caṅkuvati is provided by the folk tradition with a low-caste and even demonic link with the Pāṇḍava family that makes her a fitting partner for the similarly pedigreed Pōrmaṇṇaṇ.⁴ The chastity of Pōrmaṇṇaṇ's service to Draupadī is

can kill him. Furious at the humiliation, she stands on two distant hills and impales him with her trident as he looks up her skirts. Cf. also Beck 1981, 91–96; Brubaker 1978, 331–59; O'Flaherty 1980, 81–86; Shulman 1980a, 176–91; Biardeau, in press; and chap. 16, n. 19, above.

2. A similar male-female inversion appears in the same context in the Palnad Pōta Rāju myth in connection with the child couple who enter the Śivanandi Fort: it is always the girl who assumes the masculine warrior roles (see Roghair 1982, 205–10). But there is no discernible relation to the mythology of the goddess and Maḥiṣa, and certainly no hint at sexual byplay between the girl and Pōta Rāju. The creativity of the Draupadī cult is thus all the more remarkable.

3. In this vein, one pūcāri song emphasizes Draupadī and Pōrmaṇṇaṇ's martial complementarity: one the lion-riding “War Heroine” (Pōrvīri) and the other the “War Hero” (Pōrvīra; CC, 33).

4. On the low-caste and pollution-ridden reputation of the Madrakas (Mādri's people) in the *Mahābhārata*, see Hildebeitel 1976a, 266–79; on this dimension in the twins' disguises, see idem, 1980c, 170; on the demonic (Asuric) dimension of Mādri's brother Śalya and her marriage by purchase to Pāṇḍu, see Biardeau CR 89, 226–27, 229–30; Dumézil 1968, 73–76.

thus safeguarded by his marriage to a companion goddess of lower rank. One is reminded of similar arrangements between high- and low-ranking forms of the goddess in the cult and mythology of Reṇukā-Ellammā-Māriyamman (see Hildebeitel 1980a, 197; Brubaker 1977; 1978, 99–121).

If one thus looks at Pōrmannan's relations with these three forms of the goddess, one finds that he covers the spectrum of virtually all the possible relationships that pertain between Durgā and Mahiṣa: would-be lover, seducer, victim (of sorts), husband, and attendant devotee. But the transformation of his relation to the goddess is still more complex than this.

Let us formulate the matter as follows: why is the drama called *Pōrmannan Caṇṭai*, "Pōrmannan's Fight"? If one goes back over the story, there is no easy answer. His fight with Bhīma the woodcarrier is peripheral, and it is not really a fight, since Bhīma allows himself to be defeated.⁵ When he destroys his city, there is no opposition. The Nānavēl troupe provides the only account of a prior fight with Śiva (see chap. 16, n. 18). There is the mute theme of his "argument" with Kṛṣṇa over the goat, rice, and flour lamp, but this falls far short of a battle. And the play ends before he "fights" in the *Mahābhārata* war.

If one follows the chapbook version, then, one has a play with a most mysterious title, or, more precisely, a missing title episode. Fortunately, we know what this episode must be from other versions. Pōrmannan's "fight" must be the beheading of his father. In brief, if Pōrmannan is to satisfy all the requirements of an equivalent of Pōttu Rāja, he cannot be fully transformed into the goddess's servant-devotee without a head to hold in his hand. Once we state this equation, the title *Pōrmannan Caṇṭai* has a familiar ring. As the "Fight of the War King Who Is also the Buffalo King," it becomes a reflex of the Mahiṣāsura-mardana, the destruction of the Buffalo Demon. If we now align these two myths in terms of the events that lead up to the battles in question, a suggestive solution emerges (see table 9).

Viewed from this angle, the turnabout in the conclusion is most instructive. Pōrmannan is tricked into turning his violence, not against Vijayāmpāl, the warrior goddess, but against his city and his father. Mahiṣāsura's lust for the goddess survives in Pōrmannan as a sort of trace memory, which he reenacts in his lust for Arjuna-Vijayāmpāl. But his beheading at the hands of Durgā was once

5. Biardeau's Pondicherry version (in press) makes a bit more of this fight, and of a sequel that Bhīma wins when he remains behind after Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa have left. But they are not title-ranking bouts.

Table 9. The Destruction of Maḥiṣāsura and "Pōrmaṇṇan's Fight"

The Destruction of Maḥiṣāsura	Pōrmaṇṇan's Fight
1. Maḥiṣa lusts after Durgā and wants to marry her.	1. Pōrmaṇṇan lusts after Vijayāmpāl and wants to marry her.
2. To rob Maḥiṣa of his power by bringing out his lust, Durgā says she will marry him only if he conquers her in battle.	2. To rob Pōrmaṇṇan of the five instruments of his power, Kṛṣṇa says he can marry Vijayāmpāl only after he destroys his city and kills his father.
3. Maḥiṣa is beheaded.	3. Pōrmaṇṇan's father is beheaded.

and for all. That scene requires a different multiform and receives it in Pōrmaṇṇan's beheading of his father.

We can now see what is so intriguing about the Tindivanam pūcārī's version of the Pōrmaṇṇan story. If Pōrmaṇṇan's father is Pōttu Rāja, the outcome of "The Destruction of Maḥiṣāsura" and of "Pōrmaṇṇan's Fight" is virtually the same. In one case, we have the severed head of the Buffalo Demon, in the other the severed head of the Buffalo King. Each is the ultimate offering to the goddess: for one, the goddess in her universal form of Durgā, for the other, the goddess in one of her more local forms, as Draupadī. Moreover, it is noteworthy that in the conventional iconographic treatments of the Maḥiṣāsuramardana, the scene is usually frozen at the moment when Durgā is about to sever, not the buffalo head of Maḥiṣa, which may still be attached or lying on the ground, but the head of the demon's ultimate human form, his *puruṣa*, which emerges from his buffalo body at the point of his submission.⁶ Durgā may thus hold the Buffalo Demon's human head before it is severed, whereas Pōrmaṇṇan holds the Buffalo King's human head after it has been removed. In terms of the strategy of the Pōrmaṇṇan myth, Pōrmaṇṇan's role is thus necessary to preserve the purity of the goddess, for the severed head is impure. Indeed, it is Pōrmaṇṇan who cuts off the head himself, relieving the goddess of this additional violent charge. But let us recall that in the Cūṇitan cycle, it is Draupadī who cuts off the demon's head, or heads, and Pōttu Rāja who then holds the last head for her, to keep it from falling.

It should be evident by now that the head in the left hand of Pōrmaṇṇan-Pōttu Rāja has been the subject of numerous stories.

6. See Biardeau and Malamoud 1976, 147–49. In modern oleographs there are some exceptions that show forms of Durgā holding the severed human head, but the classical norm is for the human head to still be intact as the goddess prepares to sever it.

And indeed that is what one should expect, for Pōttu Rāja holds nothing else than a symbol of that indispensable and polymorphous principle of continuity, the potentially both regenerative and destructive "remainder" of the sacrifice (see especially Shulman 1980a, 129). It is another mythic symbol, like the head of Aravāṇ, of the "head of the sacrifice," this time even won over in the fashion that Heesterman hypothesizes for the presystematized Śrauta rites: by the Pāṇḍavas as ritual guests from an adversarial ritual host (1985, 49–50; cf. chap. 15, n. 20). Our cycle could hardly provide clearer evidence for the transferral of the principle of sacrificial continuity from the "Vedic" context to the myth-ritual complex of the goddess and the buffalo. For Pōrmaṇṇa holds the head of his "former self" Pōttu Rāja, which is none other than the head of *his* former self Mahiṣāsura, which emerged from the severed head of *his* former buffalo body to be first held by the goddess.

Up to this point, I have followed only one line of interpretation: that suggested by the name Pōttu Rāja and its evocation of this Buffalo Demon mythology. The icon, however, is in fact much richer. Thus, although I have not by any means exhausted this initial inquiry and shall pick up the thread again, I must now open another perspective on this iconic theme. In the remainder of this study, and in particular in connection with the Draupadī cult's interpretation of the *Mahābhārata* war, I will be unraveling the implications of what is in effect a double evocation. The head that Draupadī's "War King" holds is not only a sacrificial "residue" of the head of Mahiṣāsura. It also has something to do with one of the most baffling images of Hindu mythology: the *brahmaśiras*, or "head of Brahmā."

This second line of inquiry thus takes us beyond the South Indian peregrinations of Pōta Rāju to a pan-Hindu and Sanskritic mythic, ritual, and iconographic complex. Let us begin, however, by noting that our shift in perspective is also made "natively" within Pōta Rāju's larger domain, on the northern and southern fringes of his area of geographical distribution. For there we find two figures who have been identified with or mistaken for him: Śiva's two most tamasic and violent surrogates, Bhairava and Virabhadra, each a projection of Śiva's wrath. The former is regarded as the Brahmanical prototype for Pōta Rāju in parts of Andhra Pradesh (see Roghair 1982, 146; cf. Sewell 1882, xv, xxi, xxiii). And the latter is often substituted for Pōttu Rāja in Draupadī temples south of the core area, as for example at Dindigul.

Clearly the overlap between these figures results from the affinities in their myths and iconographies. Bhairava is known most

prominently as the wrathful form Śiva projects to cut off the fifth head of Brahmā, a myth we shall soon examine more closely. He can thus be shown holding the head of Brahmā in one of his left hands (he is usually at least four-armed), while a dog laps the dripping blood (see Sewell 1882; Gopinatha Rao 1971, 2: 177–78; Shastri [1916] 1974, 154–55). The dog is clearly positioned to prevent the blood from touching the ground. Indeed, his connections with the dog were remarked on in chapter 6, where we noted that as the prototypical Hindu Kṣetrapāla, Bhairava has certain affinities with Pōttu Rāja's colleague Muttāl Rāvuttaṇ. On this point, the Draupadī cult seems to have split two of Bhairava's functions: his dog and his Kṣetrapāla position go to Muttāl Rāvuttaṇ, and the head in his hand to Pōttu Rāja.

Virabhadra, on the other hand, is not normally shown holding a head (Gopinatha Rao 1971, 2: 186–88). It is he who is created out of Śiva's wrath to cut off the head of the Brahman patriarch Dakṣa for the latter's refusal to acknowledge Śiva's greatness. Despite being the father of Satī, Śiva's bride (or wife), Dakṣa shuns Śiva and ostracizes him. But the head does figure in Virabhadra's iconography under the influence of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (4.2–7) version of this myth, which has been adapted to local cults—including that of Ankāḷamman (Meyer 1984, 231–34; cf. Reiniche 1979, 130–33)—and popularized in myth and drama in southern Tamilnadu and Kerala (see Shulman 1980a, 113 and n. 15; Bolland 1980, 105). Here Virabhadra cuts off Dakṣa's head and throws it into the latter's sacrificial fire, and Dakṣa is then revived when the head of a goat (or ram, or bull) replaces the one he has lost. In such contexts, Virabhadra may be shown holding Dakṣa's human head over the sacrificial fire (see Shastri 1974, 157, fig. 100; cf. Prabhu 1977, 67, fig. 34). Presumably this myth stands behind Virabhadra's substitution for Pōttu Rāja at such places as Dindigul. But as we saw in chapter 16 (table 8, item D6), in the Ankāḷamman cult Virabhadra can also hold a different head: that of Vallālarājaṇ.

In any case, the ultimate mythic and iconic referent for all these severed heads is most certainly the head of Brahmā, the subject of a rich and varied mythology that I must now attempt to summarize. Many of the main themes that enter into this mythology are traceable to early Brāhmaṇa myths that deal with the rapport between Rudra-Śiva and Prajāpati, the prototype for Brahmā. In *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 2.2.2.8–9 (cf. 1.7.4.1–3), Prajāpati commits incest with his daughter, both of them taking the forms of antelopes (*mṛga*). The gods seek out Rudra to avenge them for this indecent treatment of their sister, and Rudra pierces Prajāpati with his arrow. Prajā-

pati's head then leaves his body and becomes the constellation Mrgaśiras, "the antelope head." *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 3.33 makes this myth the occasion to explain Rudra's title Pāśupati, "Lord of Sacrificial Victims" (cf. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.7.4.1–8). It thus seems that Rudra attains this title by correcting the dangerous, incestuous implications of the sacrifice. Moreover, the earliest form of the "head of Brahmā," the remainder of this primal sacrifice, is the head of the deer. The deer is, of course, not one of the animals fit for Vedic sacrifice (see Hildebrandt 1978, 770). In classical Hinduism, which repeats versions of this myth in the Purāṇas (see Kramrisch 1981b, 251), the deer, whose movements define the sacrificial terrain of pure Aryandom (*Laws of Manu* 2.23; cf. chap. 8), comes to be the symbol of the Brahman forest ascetic. Thus when Śiva dispatches this prototype of Brahmā's head, he becomes the Lord of Sacrificial Victims, violating the regulated world of the sacrifice in order to preserve it.

It is probably such a reinterpretation of this Brāhmaṇa mythology that lies behind the *Mahābhārata's* identification of Śiva's doomsday weapon as both the head of Brahmā and the Pāśupata, the weapon of Śiva as Lord of Sacrificial Victims. It is, of course, this very weapon that Arjuna seeks during his tapas, and when he finally asks Śiva for it, the Sanskrit epic makes the identification clear: "I wish for the terrible divine Pāśupata weapon, that Rudraic arm called Brahmā's Head, of terrible power, which at the frightful end of the yuga destroys the entire world" (*Mbh.* 3.41.7–8). The Sanskrit epic has Arjuna reserve this weapon for his war-closing duel with Aśvatthāman, whose use of it Arjuna must finally neutralize (see Biardeau 1976, 124, 212; 1978, 121–25, 154–55).

The Draupadī cult does not seem to show any recognition that the weapon won by Arjuna's tapas has any other name than the Pāśupata. But it retains, as we shall see in chapter 18, a connection—much transformed—between Aśvatthāman and the fifth head of Brahmā. These transformations, however, build upon the later and more widely popularized purāṇic versions of the mythology of Brahmā's fifth head, which I have already mentioned. These myths tell how Śiva, or his self-projected wrathful form Bhairava, severs Brahmā's fifth head after Brahmā has caused some offense: excessive pride or *tejas* ("radiance"), impiety, a lie, or lust (either for his own daughter, recalling the incest theme in the Brāhmaṇas, or for Śiva's bride Satī). And they follow with an account of how Śiva, or Bhairava, must wander the earth with the skull (*kapāla*)—an insatiable and unfillable begging bowl—stuck to his left hand until he can atone for his Brahmanicide at Kapālamocana, the "skull-

releasing" holy tank (*tīrtha*), at Banaras, into which the head will finally drop off.⁷ It would seem that because Banaras is the city that survives the Pralaya the head can be dropped there without destroying the world.

This is the Brahmanicide myth that is known regionally in the core area of the Draupadī cult through a version connected with the cult of *Āṅkāḷamman*. Indeed, I alluded to this myth in chapter 16 as the alternate myth within the *Āṅkāḷamman* cult—the other being the story of *Vallālarājan* and his fort—that accounts for its rituals of the crematorium. As there can be no doubt that it too provides the Draupadī cult with a mutually enriching counterpart to its mythology of *Pōttu Rāja*, we must now give it our attention. Meyer has found that in the *Āṅkāḷamman* cult, the Brahmanicide myth is regionally more restricted than the *Vallālarājan* myth, that it does not extend beyond our core area. In particular, she finds it most prominent among *Cempaṭavars*, and specifically linked with the main *Āṅkāḷamman* temple at *Mēl Malaiyaṇūr* (Gingee Taluk, South Arcot), the village that replaces Banaras in the myth (1984, 124, 155, 180).

Once when *Pārvaṭī* came before *Śiva* and *Brahmā*, seeing them both with five heads she could not distinguish them, and prostrated herself mistakenly before *Brahmā* while seeking her husband's blessings. *Brahmā* laughed, and *Pārvaṭī*, angered at the loss of her wifely faithfulness, cursed him to be beheaded. *Śiva*, also angry, plucked off one head, and then 999 more (the narrative makes no more of this incongruity, but cf. *ibid.*, 163: it is the middle head that keeps regenerating itself; *Viṣṇu* tells *Śiva* to pluck it off 999 times and then hold on to the thousandth head in his hand). After the thousand heads were plucked, *Brahmā* cursed *Śiva* to wander as a begger in cremation grounds, without food: whatever alms *Śiva* received, the insatiable begging bowl—*Brahmā's kapāḷam*—would devour. Crazy and defiled, *Śiva* at last arrived at *Mēl Malaiyaṇūr*.

Meanwhile, *Āṅkāḷamman*, an exiled form of *Pārvaṭī*, has wandered the earth searching for reunion with *Śiva* and has come to dwell at *Mēl Malaiyaṇūr* to regain his left side (that is, to recover her fusion with *Ardhanārīśvara*, "the lord who

7. For variants, discussion, and further references, see O'Flaherty 1973, 122–27; Biardeau 1978, 122 n. 1, 154–55; Biardeau and Malamoud 1976, 101–2, 142 n. 1; Kramrisch 1981b, 250–65; Visuvalingam 1985a, 1985b, and in press; Adiceam 1965, 23–24.

is half woman"). While Śiva is there, she goes to the cremation ground, and there she (or in some versions Kṛṣṇa; see Meyer 1981, 42) scatters blood-rice or rice mixed with lime and turmeric on the ground. In many versions the head first leaves Śiva's hand and then sticks to hers, making her go mad in turn, and explaining her behavior in the crematorium as devourer of corpses (Meyer 1984, 161, 164–65, 178, 274; 1981, 42). In any case, when the kapālam on the hand sees the scattered food, it jumps off to devour it. Śiva regains his sanity and runs to Aṅkālamman. But she assumes her frightful form and tramples the head with her foot. She then gives Brahmā's head the boon of receiving a thousand lives a day: of fish, to be caught by the Cempaṭavars. But she also curses him to have no temples. Finally, she obtains the left side of Śiva, and returns with him to Mount Kailāsa. (Main thread of this myth drawn from Meyer 1984, 36–37)

One intriguing variant makes the head fall from Śiva's hand at the very point that he and Pārvatī reunite as Ardhanārīśvara (Meyer 1984, 178), a startling realization that the release of the head of Brahmā, the ultimate doomsday weapon, coincides in its pralayaic significance with Śiva and Pārvatī's merging, the ultimate symbol of the resorption of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* at the *mahāpralaya* or *prākṛta pralaya*, the salvific "great dissolution of matter" that occurs at the end of the universe (see Hildebeitel 1983, 211).

There are, in any case, many reminders in Aṅkālamman's myths and rituals of the connection between the head of Brahmā and the Pralaya. Insatiable, the head devours everything, and can even devour the world. One pūcāri informed Meyer: "I was told that it [the kapālam] is such a terrific thing, even if you put the whole world in it, it will still be empty" (1984, 162). It is also linked with possession rites. Another pūcāri indicated that when the symbol of Brahmā's head, the *kapparai*, is danced around the streets, "anyone may dance with it, but it should not be placed on the ground and when it reaches the cremation ground only the pūcāri should carry it" (ibid., 142; cf. 162–64).

All these details have their counterparts in the mythologies of Pōttu Rāja. Should Draupadī's guardian drop the head (sometimes the thousandth head) from his hand, great disasters will result. But there are telling oppositions in the two stories. Śiva wastes away trying to drop the insatiable head in the crematorium, the dancing ground of Śiva and Aṅkālamman that is itself a symbol of the end of the universe. But Pōttu Rāja agrees to hold the head

and never drop it, a suggestion that he is to stave off the Pralaya, not bring it to fruition. Indeed, only so long as he continues to hold the head will Draupadī remain with her devotees: for a period that several myths suggest will be as long as the Kali yuga. Moreover, unlike the relation between Śiva and the insatiable head, it is Pōta Rāju himself who is insatiable, robust, and well fed. The Aṅkāḷamman cult's head of Brahmā thus presents a counterimage to the proverbial hunger of Pōta Rāju, who not only demands great quantities of food, but devours for Reṇukā the drops of Rākṣasa blood that have their parallel in the blood-rice devoured by the head of Brahmā. Thus, the Draupadī cult seems to split the theme that the Aṅkāḷamman cult here unites. It is Pōrmaṇṇaṇ who insatiably demands the rice and the poṅkal, whereas it is primarily Pōttu Rāju who holds the head to avert the equivalent of doomsday. In fact, one may suspect that insofar as the head Pōttu Rāju holds is a multiform of the head of Brahmā as doomsday weapon, it has a certain equivalence to the weapons Pōrmaṇṇaṇ brings from Śivānandapuri to enable Draupadī to win the *Mahābhārata* war. One Aṅkāḷamman cult informant told Meyer that the head of Brahmā—which destroys Rākṣasas in every yuga—destroyed Duryodhana's army in the Dvāpara yuga (1984, 164)! Of all the weapons of Pōrmaṇṇaṇ–Pōttu Rāju, the most formidable remains the head he holds in his hand (see plate 27, as discussed below).

It will be recalled from chapter 8 that Draupadī cannot hold the head herself. The fact that she also does not hold a kapālam, unlike so many other village goddesses—including Aṅkāḷamman and Māriyamman (see Shastri 1974, 212–13, 224 n. 3)—is a further indication that the head held for her by Pōttu Rāju is her cult's multiform of the head of Brahmā. Indeed, it is possible to see the head in Pōttu Rāju's hand as the head of a Brahman who recapitulates the "transgressive" character of Brahmā's fifth head (see Suntharalingam 1983, 6, 291, 329–30, 344–45, 402, 306). Where Acalamācuran is the victim, the head is that of a Brahmarākṣasa, the class of demons that, as we saw in chapter 8, includes Baka and all his omnivorous "cannibalistic" descendants and avengers. And where Pōrmaṇṇaṇ's father's is beheaded, whether he is called Pōttu Rāju or not, the head also evokes the Brahmarākṣasa typology. Not only can Pōttu Rāju be identified as both a Brahman and a Rākṣasa, but even if we take him to be a Kṣatriya, his father's renunciatory tapas suggests an intensification of the family's Brahman affinities. In the parallel myth from Palnad, where it is clear that Pōta Rāju is a Brahman, the Śivanandi Fort—equivalent of Pōrmaṇṇaṇ's Śivānandapuri—is at least temporarily a kingdom without true Rājus

or Kṣatriyas: that is, the kind of kingdom in which Brahmarākṣasas make their stands (see chap. 8 and chap. 16, sec. B). There is also something Brahmarākṣasic about the "transgressive" head of Brahmā. In this regard, let us recall the resolution of the Aṅkālam-man cult's Brahmanicide myth. The destructive, all-devouring potential of Brahmā's fifth head must be sated with a diet of a thousand fish a day. In effect, it becomes like the "Crane" Baka, the Big Fish that eats the little fish. It is thus the ultimate devouring symbol of the *matsya nyāya*, "law of the fish," discussed in chapters 8 and 9. Indeed, the devouring fifth head also fits the typical folkloric profile of the Brahmarākṣasa as well: the vengeful spirit of a Brahman who has died without fulfilling his wishes or by murder.⁸

Although these vistas of the mythologist are not directly incorporated into the Pōrmaṇṇaṇ-Pōttu Rāja myths themselves, they are certainly (excepting, of course, the myths from the Brāhmaṇas) on the Draupadī cult's horizons. Moreover, there are enough links with Śiva—Pōttu Rāja is a great Śivabhakta, Pōrmaṇṇaṇ rules at Śivānandapuri, and so on—to let us know that Pōttu Rāja is also, like Bhairava and Virabhadra, a multiform of the Great God. Indeed, it may be proposed that if Virabhadra and Bhairava are forms of Śiva who relieve Śiva himself of contact with the destructive and polluting remainder-head, Pōttu Rāja is a further manifestation of these lower forms who relieves Draupadī of the same kind of contact. Indeed, icons of Bhairava, as Kṣetrapāla, carry not only the skull but other weapons (e.g., *śūla*, or trident; drum; and *pāśa*, or cord; see Adiceam 1968, 25–37) whose multiforms Pōrmaṇṇaṇ brings to Draupadī. In this vein, let us also recall Brameesa Mudaliyar's insistence that Pōttu Rāja is the right person to hold Rōcakan's head precisely because he is a Śivabhakta (chap. 5, sec. B).

Yet we must not identify Pōttu Rāja so much with Śiva and Bhairava as to forget the specifics of his mythology and its connections with the vagaries of village animal sacrifices: connections that he inherits, in Draupadī cult myth, from the real animal sacrifices he oversees for various South Indian village goddesses. For the present, then, we leave the mythology of Śiva's Brahmanicide. Except for the occasional reminder, we shall not return to it until our closing chapters, where it will reemerge with a vengeance in

8. See chap. 8, n. 10. It is to this connection, rather than to supposed non-Brahmanical origins (Claus 1978, 4–8), that one should probably look for an explanation of Brahmā's status as "supreme Bhūta" in the South Kanara Bhūta cult, where according to Prabhu (1977, 38, 206–7) one shrine portrays him with five devouring heads (see chap. 11, nn. 38, 39).

the Draupadī cult's closing visions of Kurukṣetra. It is enough for now to have established that the head Pōttu Rāja (or Pōrmannan) holds in his hand is not only a "karmic" residue of the human (*puruṣa*) head of Mahiṣāsura, but a multiform of the Brahmarākṣasic head of Brahmā. For the remainder of this chapter we must follow some further implications of Pōrmannan's affinities with the Buffalo Demon, but with a shift now from dealing with the myths on their own to examining their connections with rituals.

We have already noted hints that Pōttu Rāja holds the head of the Buffalo Demon, his "former self." Thus the Tindivanam pūcārī's anomalous insistence that it is the head of Pōttu Rāja, the Buffalo King, that Pōrmannan holds in his hand. Elliot (1866?) also records that in a village buffalo sacrifice in Karnataka, one of the functions of the outcaste human Potrāj is to lift "the head of the buffalo on to his own head" in a procession that apparently results in the head's disposal at the village boundary (cf. Elliot 1860a, 3: 340; Hildebeitel 1985c, 194). Here the human Potrāj holds the buffalo head, though on his own head rather than in one of his hands. One senses here that the handling of the impurity of the sacrifice results in an identification with the buffalo victim rather than simply being an act of service to the goddess. But whether the human Potrāj puts the sacrificial buffalo's head on his head or the iconic Pōttu Rāja holds the Buffalo Demon's human head in his hand, it is Mahiṣāsura who stands behind the image.

We have also observed numerous connections between Pōttu Rāja, Pōrmannan, and the goat: in particular, goat sacrifices to Pōttu Rāja, and Pōrmannan's demands for the gigantic goat—and in some cases the head of the goat—and the mountains of rice. No doubt such double evocations of the goat and the buffalo must be explained with reference to ritual dimensions of Pōttu Rāja's many services to the goddess. One suspects, however, that an interpretation should begin with an examination of his role of overseeing goat sacrifices. In the logic of Indian sacrificial systems, would not the "Buffalo King" become a "Protector of the Goats" he receives as offerings? And as an image of the sacrificer (*yajamāna*), would he not be identified with his victims? These are questions that can only be posed at this point, and not answered, as they draw upon images that are left tacit in the myths. But there are a number of suggestions that as the buffalo is offered to the goddess, so the goat is offered to the buffalo (cf. Biardeau, in press). In festivals to Pōttu Rāja such as that at Maṅkaḷam described in chapter 16, it is quite clear that the Buffalo King receives the goat offerings. More curiously, in the now discontinued buffalo sacrifice at Kannapuram

(Coimbatore District), Beck indicates that the buffalo was sacrificed at the same time the last goat was offered at the *kampam*, or sacrificial stake (1981, 97 n. 19). Since this stake is ambivalently linked to the goddess's demon husband and is shaded by connections of the same type—both mythic and ritual—that obtain between Mahiṣāsura and Pōta Rāju (ibid., 118–23), the coincidence could be taken to imply that when the sacrificial buffalo is killed it receives in its “living demon devotee” *kampam* form a goat at the very point of its beheading. Such a relationship between buffalo and goat may explain the pervasive practice at village goddess festivals of having goat sacrifices precede the culminating sacrifice of the water buffalo (see Hildebeitel 1980a, 190; and above, chap. 13, sec. C).

In *Pōrmaṇṇan Caṇṭai*, however, there is one final aspect of the head that has a further unfolding. The most common name for Pōrmaṇṇan's father in the play and related stories is Śivalingam, a variant being Gurulingam, where Śivalingam is said to be Pōrmaṇṇan's grandfather. The beheading of Śivalingam is further connected with the persistent iconographic representation of Pōrmaṇṇan–Pōttu Rāja with a Śivalingam on his head (see plate 26): a theme that also finds expression in Brameesa Mudaliyar's account of the Cunītan myth, in which Pōttu Rāja arrives from Kalinga wearing a Śivalingam (chap. 5, sec. B). There thus seems to be a double tradition here: in one instance, Śivalingam's head is in Pōrmaṇṇan's hand; in the other, the Śivalingam is on Pōrmaṇṇan's head.

Fortunately, thanks to Shulman, an explanation is possible. Most significantly, it arises from a version of the “Destruction of Mahiṣāsura” that is linked with the two most prominent Hindu religious centers—Kanchipuram and Tiruvannamalai—in the heartland of the Draupadī cult. According to the *Aruṇācalapurāṇam*, the *sthala purāṇa* of the mountain and of the great Śiva temple below it at Tiruvannamalai, when Devī (i.e., Pārvatī) “committed the fault of covering Śiva's eyes and momentarily plunging the world in darkness,” she expiated herself at Kanchipuram and was told there by Śiva to go to Tiruvannamalai and continue performing tapas in a forest hut. In this forest (let us recall Draupadī's own forest hut, and the “Forest Draupadī Temple” to the southeast of Tiruvannamalai Mountain), the gods find her and “complain to her of the mischief caused by the demon Mahiṣa.”

The goddess angrily instructed Durgā [Tamil Vintai] to kill Mahiṣa in battle. The war ranged around the hut of the goddess at Aruṇācalam [Tiruvannamalai]; Durgā . . . cut off

the head of Mahiṣa. To her horror and amazement, upon the severed head of Mahiṣa she discovered a bright [or, according to the commentary, crystal] *linga*.

Durgā took this *linga* back to the goddess, but when Devī took it, it stuck to her hand. To expiate the evil of killing a devotee of Śiva, the goddess commanded Durgā to strike the mountain with her sword. Water gushed forth, and Devī bathed in it for a month. Finally the *linga* dropped from her hand. The goddess then circumambulated the holy mountain, and Śiva appeared and granted her request to become the left half of his body. (Shulman 1980a, 179–80)

With the Śivalingam on his head, Pōrmannan or Pōttu Rāja is none other, once again, than a transformation of Mahiṣāsura: a regionally prominent form of Mahiṣāsura with a lingam on his head. Indeed, in his transformation from demon to devotee, the lingam on the head—a symbol of chastity and yogic control of sexual impulses—is clearly the sublimation of his prior sexual aggressiveness (cf. Fuller and Logan 1985, 90). Furthermore, in carrying the head of Śivalingam forever in his hand, Pōrmannan does for Draupadī what in this version Durgā has to do for herself: handle the impurity of the sacrificial head. But most important, one recognizes another variation on the striking theme we first met in the mythology of Ankāḷamman: the coincidence between the releasing of the head—this time Mahiṣa's rather than Brahmā's—and the resorption of Śiva and the goddess into their androgynous reunion. The heads of Brahmā and Mahiṣa are thus each other's multiforms in these sister mythologies of our core area, a fact that helps us to understand how both can be evoked in connection with the one Draupadī cult image of Pōttu Rāja–Pōrmannan.

One can, of course, point to both Oedipal and self-castration images in the ramifications of these myths. For not only does Pōrmannan kill his father, but he kills a father who is in some sense his own alter ego and then carries the head as a multiform of his lingam.⁹ But as with the partially overlapping mythology of Ara-

9. Indeed, with hints that Draupadī is mother of all (see the dramatists' song, chap. 1), and even that she is Pōrmannan's mother (see Muttāl Rāvuttan's reasons for submitting himself to Pōrmannan in chap. 6, sec. B), one can construe Pōrmannan's myth as Oedipal in both senses: he kills his father, and insofar as both Vijayāmpāl and Caṅkuvati are substitutes for Draupadī, he wants to marry his mother. As the search for the "Indian Oedipus" rarely finds these two strains together (see most recently Ramanujan 1983), the Pōrmannan cycle might hold some interest. It is striking, though, that the two strains must be assembled from variants and undercurrents. The myths never bring them into one focus as an Oedipal problematic. Cf. also below, chap. 18, n. 16.

vāṇ's sacrifice, I will resist lifting these themes from the sacrificial and devotional context in which they are embedded.¹⁰ What bears emphasis is the Tiruvannamalai myth's precious testimony that the iconography and mythology linking Draupadī with Pōrmaṇṇaṇ and Pōttu Rāja must have been developed—barring unconscious or archetypal explanations—when the Buffalo King's connection with the Buffalo Demon was still understood.

Despite the fact that no current-day informants have been found who link the two figures etymologically,¹¹ we have encountered too many connectives to allow for any other possibility than that at some point, or at least to some individuals, the relationship was clear. To what has been adduced already, above all Arjuna's disguise as Vijayāmpāl, let me just add one more piece of evidence, which I regard to be as decisive as possible. At the Draupadī temple at Māṇāmpāṭi, the bas-relief of Pōttu Rāja that faces Draupadī's inner sanctum shows what is almost certainly a pair of upward curving horns on his head, surmounted by his conventional lingam (see plate 26). It is true that rather than identifying these protrusions as animal horns, Brameesa Mudaliyar insisted they were Pōttu Rāja's matted locks (*jaṭai*). But Pōttu Rāja's *jaṭai*, while often depicted by long wavy mats (see plate 18), never have such a horned shape. Leaving our informant to try to square this Māṇāmpāṭi icon with his view that Pōttu Rāja must be a human king, I would maintain that within the area of my fieldwork it is a unique case of a Buffalo King with horns.¹²

B. The Services of the War King

We have thus found that the Draupadī cult presents especially strong, though by no means unique, evocations of the mythology

10. I have noted that identities move from the more encompassing divine to the more delimited demonic (cf. Reiniche 1979, 130–32; Kapferer 1983, 124–28): that is, from Śiva to Bhairava and Virabhadra, and from the latter pair to Pōttu Rāja. It is now clear that this principle must also include Mahiṣa, whose defeat by the goddess exposes his rapport with Śiva. Shulman (1980a, 177–88) also explores this theme as one of identity between Śiva and Mahiṣa. But this identity is always worked around Mahiṣa's submission to the goddess. There are no grounds for presupposing an Ur-myth in which Śiva and Mahiṣa are primally one. The same qualification applies to the "identity" of Śiva and Pōttu Rāja.

11. Biardeau, in press, found the same situation in Andhra Pradesh.

12. The Māṇāmpāṭi slab also has a less well defined horned Pōttu Rāja on its back, facing away from the Draupadī temple. Let us note that a Gadaba village temple to Nūkālamma in East Godavari District, Andhra, has a similar combination of elements in front of it: "a rock with images of Pōturāju, a buffalo and an axe carved on it," along with a post of the type widely identified with Pōta Rāja in Andhra, and a forked stake used for goat and buffalo sacrifices. Nūkālamma's temple is itself crowned by a pair of buffalo horns. See Eisenhauer 1985, 18–19, with figures.

of the Buffalo Demon in its stories of the origins of the Buffalo King. What is striking, also, is that these evocations are stronger, or at least more transparent, in the *Mahābhārata* mythology centered on Pōrmanṇaṇ than they are in the Gingee mythology centered on Pōttu Rāja. One is therefore alerted to the likelihood that there will be other correlations, especially in the area of ritual, between the slaying of Mahiṣa and the Draupadī festival's re-creations of the *Mahābhārata* war.

The two cycles of Draupadī cult myths suggest, however, that the services that Pōttu Rāja is to render the goddess are of two different types. As things are resolved in the Cunitaṇ cycle, the *Mahābhārata* war has been over for some generations, and it is Draupadī's second advent that becomes the occasion for Pōttu Rāja to begin his perpetual stand as the guardian of the main gate or entrance to her temple. In the Pōrmanṇaṇ cycle, Draupadī is still living her epic life, and Pōrmanṇaṇ arrives just in time to make his indispensable contributions to her cause in the *Mahābhārata* war. To be sure, he may still stand guard outside her temple, a temple assimilated in the Tindivanam pūcārī's account to the fort in which the *Mahābhārata* war takes place.¹³ But there are also descriptions of him leading the Pāṇḍava army and in some vague way—sometimes in the company of Muttāl Rāvuttaṇ—participating in the war. Indeed, nowhere in his war marshalship more vividly represented than on a Sowcarpet (Madras) temple fresco, which shows him holding a head and leading the Pāṇḍavas, on his right, into battle and three bearers of his ceremonial implements, on his left, toward what one may take to be a ritual equivalent of the battlefield: the firepit (see plate 27). This contrast between fixed and mobile roles may remind one of the exceptional but revealing distinction made at Cīrūvālai between the stationary stone icon of "Pōttu Rāja" and the processional wooden icon of "Pōrmanṇaṇ." It would seem that while the former reflects what is usually Pōttu Rāja's role of "posted" guardian, the latter reflects the quite different and even contradictory role that at least logically belongs more to Pōrmanṇaṇ: the "active" role of *paṭaittalaivan*, "headman of troops" or "commander of an army" (PMC, 33).

Let us note, however, that this combination of roles is not really contradictory, nor is it unique. In the *Caṇḍī Maṅgala* of Bengal, which tells how the animals of the forest are turned to the service of the goddess in the establishment of a kingdom, the buffalo becomes both the guardian of the goddess's gate and the leader of a thousand soldiers (Bhattacharya 1981, 23). Similarly, the bull-

13. See chap. 16, n. 15. Indeed, the goddess's fight with Mahiṣāsura may take place in her temple's inner sanctum, as at Madurai (see Fuller and Logan 1985, 90).

headed *Taḷavāy Mātaṇ* (see chap. 16, n. 3), who stands guard at the temples of several deities in Tirunelveli District (Reiniche 1979, 27), derives the first element of his name from *taḷavāy*: “army leader” or “commander.” It is not clear in these cases whether the combination of roles relates to different types of icons. What is important is simply that the two roles are not mythically contradictory. In the Draupadī cult, it is the *Mahābhārata* that provokes their division. All that seems to make them contradictory results from different strategies for explaining Pōttu Rāja’s (or Pōrmaṇṇa’s) “new” services to the goddess in connection with the *Mahābhārata* war.

Yet one should not think that what Pōttu Rāja does is necessarily new to the *Mahābhārata*. Both the gatekeeper and the war leader roles are well accounted for in classical terms. As to the first, the Sanskrit epic itself (3.81) mentions Yakṣa and Yakṣī gatekeepers (*dvārapālas*) who stand on the boundaries at the intermediate points of Kurukṣetra. Indeed, according to nineteenth-century accounts from Kurukṣetra itself, these Yakṣas sang and danced during the war and drank the blood of the slain (Cunningham 1970, 89). But most important for our purposes are Pōttu Rāja’s predecessors in the position of leader of the Pāṇḍava army.

In the matter of who leads the Pāṇḍava army, the *Mahābhārata* of the Draupadī cult inherits a rather fluid tradition. In the Sanskrit epic (see 5.154.12), the position of *senāpati*—army leader or marshal—belongs officially to Draupadī’s brother Dhṛṣṭadyumna. Born from fire and an incarnation of a portion of Agni (the sacrificial fire), he replicates Agni’s Vedic role as vanguard and leader of the army of the gods (*R̥g Veda* 8.73.8; *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 5.3.1.1; cf. Venkatesa Acharya 1981, 49–50, 329). But the classical Tamil epic tradition has rearranged matters in an obvious effort to find a place for a figure who can represent the popular god Murukaṇ (Skanda), the son of Śiva who leads the army of the gods in post-Vedic mythologies. Thus beginning with Peruntēvaṇār and continuing with Villiputtūr, Virāṭa’s son Śveta, an obscure figure in the Sanskrit epic, has been given “Murukaṇ traits”—a period cursed to live as a peacock (Murukaṇ’s mount), death by a *vēl*, or lance (Murukaṇ’s weapon)—and has been nominated by Kṛṣṇa to be the first leader of the Pāṇḍava army, leaving Dhṛṣṭadyumna to succeed him after he dies on the war’s first day.¹⁴

14. See Venkatesa Acharya 1981, 82–83, 135, 150–52; *Villipāratam* 4.5.19–20 (Śveta’s peacock past), 5.5.12 and 5.8.16 (appointment to lead the army), 6.1.70 and 6.2.2 (death and Dhṛṣṭadyumna’s succession). Pampa’s tenth-century *Bhārataṁ* also has Śveta lead the army first, but significantly without these traits (Venkatesa Acharya 1981, 329–31). The Telugu *Mahābhārata* makes Śveta a name for Dhṛṣṭadyumna and identifies them as one person (Subramanian 1967, 213).

In the epic mythology of the Draupadī cult, neither Śveta nor Dhṛṣṭadyumna is given much play. The former's one-day battle stand is the subject of the chapbook drama *Pārata Yuttattil Mutalnāl Caṇṭai* (1978), but I have no record of its performance. And the latter, as already noted (see chap. 9, sec. B), is in eclipse. It is not that these two figures are unknown. Rather, they are treated as if they were cultically peripheral. The reasons for this, however, are twofold, and are not far to seek.

First of all, the issue of who leads the Pāṇḍava army is rather ambiguous. Ultimately, as anyone can tell you, the role is Kṛṣṇa's. In the main passage where the issue is raised in the Sanskrit epic, it is stated that at Kṛṣṇa's direction, Dharma "appointed Dhṛṣṭadyumna marshal of all the armies, he who had been born from fire to be the slayer of Droṇa. And he made Guḍākeśa Dhanamjaya [Arjuna] the marshal's marshal [*senāpatipatim*] of all those great-spirited men. And . . . Janārdana [Kṛṣṇa] was Arjuna's guide [*netṛ*] and the driver of his horses" (5.154.12–14).¹⁵ Dhṛṣṭadyumna thus directs the army, Arjuna directs Dhṛṣṭadyumna, and Kṛṣṇa is the Netṛ—the guide or leader—of Arjuna. If the war dramas of the Terukkūttu cycle thus make Kṛṣṇa the de facto marshal of the Pāṇḍava armies, they do no more than build on a well-founded tradition. Other marshals such as Śveta or Dhṛṣṭadyumna are more or less figureheads.

But the main reason for Dhṛṣṭadyumna's eclipse in the Draupadī cult is the emergence of the new figurehead marshal Pōrmanṇan-Pōttu Rāja. This was first appreciated by Biardeau (in press), most notably in connection with the local iconography of the Draupadī temple at Kūttampākkam. There, in what seems to be a unique configuration, two posts—shaped like those identified with Pōta Rāju in Andhra Pradesh—are set facing into the temple in the customary position of Pōttu Rāja's stone slab. The shorter post, made of stone and set farther from the shrine, is called Pōttu Rāja,¹⁶ and the taller post, of wood and nearer the shrine, is called Akkiniskampam (Sanskrit *agniskambha*), or "Fire Post." The Kūttampākkam Akkiniskampam was said to have been born at the same time as Draupadī-amman. As Biardeau perceived, this joint birth makes the "fire post" an equivalent of Draupadī's epic "twin"

15. But cf. *Mbh.* 14.59.9–15: Kṛṣṇa says first Śikhaṇḍin was the Pāṇḍavas' "leader" (*netṛ*), protected by Arjuna until the death of Bhīṣma, and then Dhṛṣṭadyumna, protected by Bhīma. This passage seems to concern not so much the marshalship of the Pāṇḍava army as who "leads" in helping them against successive opponents: first Bhīṣma, then Droṇa, etc.

16. I will discuss stone post Pōttu Rājas of this design, unusual but not unknown at Draupadī temples, in volume 2.

Dhr̥ṣṭadyumna. Moreover, not only is it a mythological multiform of Dhr̥ṣṭadyumna, but a ritual multiform—in its specific shape—of Pōta Rāju–Pōttu Rāja, the sacrificial stake.

It is clear that with the joint birth of Draupadī and the Akkiniskampam our discussion shades over momentarily from Draupadī cult mythology to Draupadī cult ritual. We should observe, however, that the Akkiniskampam is not the only piece of ritual equipment whose origins are described in the myths that account for the coming together of Draupadī and Pōttu Rāja. To put matters as simply as possible, it seems that there are two primary mythic settings for the origins of the Draupadī cult's main ritual implements. In one, they come to Draupadī along with Pōrmaṇṇaṇ (or Pōttu Rāja). And in the other they are born together with Draupadī. The latter we have seen not only in the case of the Kūttampākkam Akkiniskampam, but in Brameesa Mudaliyar's account of the five instruments that are born along with Draupadī from King Cuniṭaṇ's sacrificial fire at Gingee (see chap. 5, Sec. B). Indeed, this second joint-birth setting seems to presuppose some form of the Cuniṭaṇ myth, even though Biardeau mentions no such details from Kūttampākkam.

Each of these mythic settings has been found in other variants as well. The pāratiyār Venugopala Aiyar told his version of the Cuniṭaṇ myth without mentioning the origin of the ritual implements, but when asked on another occasion why certain ritual paraphernalia are so prominent in the Draupadī cult, he responded that the particular articles were "born with Ammaṇ." Similarly, at the Blackpalli Draupadī temple in Bangalore, a fresco shows the birth of Draupadī with a number of ritual implements that rise together with her from the sacrificial fire (see plate 28). On the other hand, in a variant from Kolar, we have noted how the Rākṣasa Pōttu Rāja brings the karakam pot with him when he comes to protect Draupadī and the Pāṇḍavas after the death of Kṛṣṇa (see chap. 16, Sec. B).

I will discuss these two variant mythical settings in a moment. But first, let us marshal together all our variants on the implements themselves. As table 10 makes plain, it is they that reveal the fundamental consistency of the two variant myths of their origins.

Beyond the very limited definitions of these articles given in table 10, let us note only the following. The *pūcai peṭṭi*, more commonly called the *paṇṭāra peṭṭi* or *pūcāri peṭṭi*, is a small container for the turmeric powder (i.e., *vīrakantakam*) that the pūcāri or paṇṭāram (any non-Brahman temple priest) uses for pūjās. It is noteworthy that the Tindivanam pūcāri regards it as containing Pōrmaṇṇaṇ's

Table 10. Origins of the Draupadi Cult's Ritual Implements

	Brought by Pōrmanñan				Born with Draupadi				Total
	PMC-O	PMC-C	MR-PM	TP	KR	VMPM	PVA	BTF	KT*
Viracāṭṭi (whip)	x	x(5)**	x	x		x	x	x	11
Virapampai (drum)	x	x(3)	x	x		x	x		8
Virakantakam (turmeric)	x	x(2)	x	x		x	x		7
Virakuntam (<i>cūlam</i>)	x	x(3)		x		x	x		7
Pūcai peṭṭi (pūjā box)	x	x(5)							6
Koṭṭilai (flagstaff)	x	x(2)		x					4
Viramallāri (drum?)		x(3)	x						4
Uṭakkai (drum)			x	x					2
Viramaṇi (bell)							x	x	2
Cilampu (anklet)				x					1
Bow and arrow								x	1
Parrot								x	1
Drumsticks							x		1
Akkiniskampam (post)									1
Karakam (pot)					x			x	1

*PMC-O = Pōrmanñan *Caṇṭai* as observed (Pakkiripālaiyam troupe); PMC-C = Pōrmanñan *Caṇṭai* in chapbook; MR-PM = Muttal Rāvuttan-Pōrmanñan combat (as observed in performance by Pakkiriipālaiyam troupe); TP = Tindivanam pūcāri's version; KR = Kolar Rākṣasa story; VMPM = V. M. Brameesa Mudaliyar account; PVA = P. Venugopala Aiyar account; BTF = Bangalore (Blackpalli) temple fresco; KT = Kūttampākkam temple account.

**Parenthesized numbers indicate the references to each article within the chapbook drama's five different enumerations.

"life" (see chap. 16, n. 15). Of the drums, while the small hourglass-shaped *uṭukkai* and the larger barrel-shaped *pampai* are well attested in Draupadī cult ceremonial and may both be used by the Terukkūttu musicians, the identification of the *mallāri* is only probable. Indira Peterson has suggested to me that *mallāri* may be derivative from the North Indian *mallāra rāga*, or melody, which is given as "a kind of musical mode" in the *Tamil Lexicon* and cross-referenced with the alternate spelling *mallari*, "a kind of drum." If it is a drum, it would seem to be linked to the Terukkūttu tradition, as it is mentioned only in the dramas. But my two dramatist informants had no idea what it was, despite mentioning it in one of their performances.

It is essential to recognize that virtually all of these items are implements of Draupadī cult ceremonial. Moreover, while it is customary to enumerate them in groups of five, it is only the *pāratyārs* who attempt to fix such lists at that number (in both cases, notably omitting the *pūcai peṭṭi*, no doubt because it is from the province of the *pūcāris*). For the dramatists and the Tindivanam *pūcāri*, however, the fivefold numerology is clearly elastic. Moreover, if one sets the two groups of myths together, the first four items are the most frequently invoked across the board. And along with the fifth and sixth items, it is no accident that the most frequently mentioned instruments are also the ones most widely in evidence ritually at Draupadī festivals.

The most important matter mythically is the association that virtually all of these implements have with *Pōrmaṇṇaṇ-Pōttu Rāja*. The association is transparent when the implements are brought by *Pōrmaṇṇaṇ*, although the case of the *karakam* pot—usually a symbol of the goddess herself—is, as we shall see, anomalous in this connection.¹⁷ But even when the articles are born with Draupadī, *Pōttu Rāja* must be present when she uses them to kill *Acalaṁmācuraṇ*. Not only are the articles born with Draupadī largely the same as those brought by *Pōrmaṇṇaṇ*, but in the case of *Kūttampākkam*, they include the *Akkiniskampam*, a multiform of *Pōta Rāju* as the sacrificial stake. We have also seen that both the *cilampu* anklet and the *pampai* drum are used in processional dancing at the *Maṅkaḷam* festival to *Pōttu Rāja*. There one finds an inversion of the situation in "*Pōrmaṇṇaṇ's Fight*," for it is the three village

17. However, along with one *garagam* (*karakam*) pot for each of his seven sisters, *Pōta Rāju* in Andhra may have an additional *garagam* of his own, topped uniquely by a "three-foot lingam" made of an upside-down tripod branch. All eight are danced atop heads through the streets (Eisenhauer 1985, 19 and figure).

goddesses who in effect lead the dance in a procession to Pōttu Rāja, which may remind us that *Ankālamman*, in a variant, similarly enters the fort of *Vallālarājan* with pampai drum and anklets (Meyer 1984, 186; see table 8, D10). It is thus only the seldom indicated bell, bow and arrow, parrot, and drumsticks that fall outside the purview of Pōttu Rāja.¹⁸

Nevertheless, it is still clearly the Pōrmannan myth that most thoroughly articulates the connection between the implements and Pōttu Rāja. More than this, just as the various implements are not unique to the Tamil Draupadī cult, so the myths of the origins of such articles find analogues in the mythologies of other village and lineage goddesses. Most remarkably, as we saw in chapter 7, the North Indian Pāṇḍava-Draupadī cult of Garhwal introduces a figure cut unmistakably from the same cloth as Pōrmannan: the low-caste blacksmith deity *Kaliya Lohar*, supplier of the Pāṇḍavas' weapons and probable multiform, like Pōrmannan-Pōttu Rāja, of the *śamī* tree as the weapons' source. Closer to home, among other South Indian goddesses, *Ankāamma-Ankālamman* has two distinct myths of the source of her cultic implements, myths that parallel those of Draupadī. In her Tamil cult, without Pōttu Rāja, her five implements are born with her (table 8, D4). And in her Andhra cult of Palnad, her various ritual implements are brought by Pōta Rāju—at the instigation of *Brahma Nāyudu*, Viṣṇu incarnate—from the *Śivanandī* Fort. In the same vein as the latter account, a myth from the cult of *Paccaivāliyamman*, recorded in January 1982 at her temple in *Elumēṭu* village in Cuddalore (now Panruti) Taluk, South Arcot, concerns itself with a comparable outcome:

Akkiṇi Viraṇ and *Ākāya Viraṇ*, two demons, stole *Paccaivāliyamman*'s pūcai peṭṭi while she was doing tapas under a green pandal. She complained to *Pārvaṭi*. Viṣṇu assumed his *Viśvarūpa* and took the gigantic form of *Vala Munīcuvaraṇ*. He chased the demons and caught them at the coast near Cuddalore. In haste and anger he cut off *Ākāya Viraṇ*'s head, but *Akkiṇi Viraṇ* promised to become *Paccaivāliyamman*'s watchman, was pardoned, and returned the pūcai peṭṭi to her.

On *Paccaivāliyamman*, I note only that her cult also overlaps *Draupadī*'s regionally, is centered on firewalking, and is most prominent

18. On the parrot, cf. Beck 1981, 122, n. 62.

among Vanniyaṛs.¹⁹ Akkiṇi Vīraṇ (“Fire Hero”) thus stands in a demon-turned-watchman relation to her that is reminiscent of the relation of Pōrmaṇṇaṇ-Pōttu Rāja—alias Maḥiṣāsura—to Draupadī. It is when each comes to serve the goddess as watchman—as is symbolized by an icon of Akkiṇi Vīraṇ outside Paccivāḷiyammaṇ temples—that the pūcai peṭṭi is installed as part of the goddess’s cult. Once again it is Viṣṇu who makes their collaboration possible.

The Pōrmaṇṇaṇ myth thus once again widens the horizons of Draupadī’s Pōttu Rāja, not only in connection with parallel myths and counterpart figures in other goddess cults, but in his ritual significance. Why, then, does Draupadī have two myths in one cult to account for the origins of her ritual implements? And why is Pōttu Rāja indispensable in one, though under the name Pōrmaṇṇaṇ, while in the other, as Pōttu Rāja proper, he is only peripheral? To answer these questions, let us once again take the Maḥiṣāsuramardana as our point of departure.

We have seen that the story of “Pōrmaṇṇaṇ’s Fight” is a crafty and humorous reworking of the seduction, death, and conversion of Maḥiṣāsura. If we reconstruct the line of tacit mythology that transforms Maḥiṣa into Pōttu Rāja, we might infer that before he comes to the service of various local goddesses such as Draupadī and Ankāmma, his death at the hands of Durgā is followed by an intercession by Śiva that leads him to the “City or Fort of the Bliss of Śiva,” ■ place where he can demonstrate his true identity as a Śivabhakta. Indeed, there he can revere the lingam that first appears on his “Maḥiṣa-head”—according to the Tiruvannamalai *sthalapurāṇa*—at the very moment of his death, and that he can then bring atop his “Pōttu Rāja-Pōrmaṇṇaṇ head” when he enters the service of Draupadī. But what about the bringing of the ritual implements? To answer this question, we must turn momentarily to the alternate myth that traces their origins to Draupadī’s birth from fire. For here the nature of these articles is the most transparent.

The myths in which the implements are coemergent from fire with the birth of Draupadī also present clear echoes of the mythology of Durgā and the Buffalo Demon. But they are echoes of a different segment of the myth. In brief, it is a question of the birth sequence rather than the killing sequence. In *Devī Māhātmyam* 2.10–33, Durgā is born from the combined *tejas*—the fiery, luminous splendor—of the various male gods. This itself is a multiform

19. For an earlier recording and discussion of the same myth, see Biardeau 1967–68, 523–26; cf. also Biardeau and Malamoud 1976, 145–46; in press; and above chap. 4, n. 18 (probably the same as Paccaiyamman). See also Shulman 1980b.

of the theme of birth from fire that accounts not only for the birth of Draupadī, but of countless Indian, and especially South Indian, goddesses.²⁰ At her birth, however, Durgā—unlike the epic Draupadī—appears bearing in her hands the various weapons, given by the gods, that she will use to kill the Buffalo Demon. The foremost of these weapons is the trident (śūla) of Śiva. Now when Draupadī is born from fire with her pūjā articles, they also—at least in Brameesa Mudaliyar's account—include the cūlam (śūla) or Vīrakuntam and are used for the killing of Acalammācuraṇ. But the Vīrakuntam is more than a weapon. All the implements born with Draupadī are *ritual* weapons: the implements by which she combats the ills of this world.²¹

Once we recognize the Mahiṣāsura-mardana, in its different segments, as the prototype for both myths, we see that the two variants transform the Mahiṣāsura-mardana in opposite ways, each following an inexorable logic that flows directly from the prior mythic situation. In the accounts where the implements appear with Draupadī at her birth, it is impossible for Pōttu Rāja to bring the weapons to her. For the myth is modeled on a segment of the Mahiṣāsura-mardana in which Durgā has yet to kill the Buffalo Demon. Thus if Pōttu Rāja is Mahiṣāsura converted through the latter's death, the goddess must first kill him as the Buffalo Demon before he can be transformed into Pōttu Rāja, bringer of ritual weapons. One also marks in these versions the tendency to refine Pōttu Rāja by making him a Brahman, a caste identity that not only distances him from his buffalo antecedents, but also from a warrior's interest in weapons. Accordingly, Draupadī thus needs no weapons from Pōttu Rāja, only his service of holding the demon's last head, the ultimate weapon of all.

Once we realize that the ritual implements of the Draupadī cult are weapons, indeed that they are implicitly—in mythic terms—

20. On Durgā's birth from fire, see Sircar 1967, 50, 70. In *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 11.4.3.1ff., Śrī is born from the austerities (heated tapas) of Prajāpati (the sacrifice). See James 1959, 104, on Vedic and Brahmanic citations for Umā as daughter of Agni. Minākṣī is also born from a sacrificial fire. Cf. also Oppert 1893, 483 (Māriyamman), and 485 (Aṅkālamman).

21. Let us recall that Aṅkālamman too is born with five pūjā articles, including the cūlam, which are to be used for similar ends. Yet as we have seen (table 8, D4 ff.), her myth does without Pōttu Rāja, and it is thus connected less with the mythology of Durgā and Mahiṣa than with that of Pārvatī, Śiva, Virabhadra, and the head of Brahmā. Her birth with "weapons" thus bears only a distant affinity with Durgā's, and instead evokes the many-weaponed Kālī. Kṛṣṇa's tricking Aṅkālamman to give her implements to Śiva thus follows the fashion of so many myths about Kālī's pacification (cf. chap. 13, sec. A).

the weapons with which Durgā slew the Buffalo Demon, we are able to recognize the most brilliant of all the improvisations of the mythology of Pōrmaṇṇaṇ. The ultimate service of the War King is not simply to lead the Pāṇḍava army at Kurukṣetra, or as Kṛṣṇa puts it in the beginning of the drama, to provide Draupadī with the implements that will enable her to win the war and tie up her hair. It is to bring to Draupadī multiforms of the very weapons with which he—Pōrmaṇṇaṇ—Pōttu Rāja—had formerly been slain by the goddess, the weapons that transformed him from a demon into a devotee.

One thus sees how it is that these ritual weapons have two origins. On the one hand they are Pōttu Rāja's, and on the other hand they are Draupadī's. In Draupadī festival rituals, both Draupadī's and Pōttu Rāja's icons will wear or handle them on different occasions. More than this, the weapons function as extensions and multiforms of Pōttu Rāja himself.

In closing our discussion of Pōrmaṇṇaṇ's mythology, however, let us recall the play on words with which Kṛṣṇa urges the Pāṇḍavas to begin their quest for the five implements in the chapbook version of "Pōrmaṇṇaṇ's Fight":

Pāñcālī, being [none other than] Yājñasenī, needs to have the heroic whip [and other pūjā implements]. If all these things are found with my younger sister, then, having won the eighteen-day war, Yājñasenī can tie up her hair.

The name Yājñasenī, so carefully underscored here, means "she whose army is connected with the sacrifice." Indeed the Tamil Yākaṇi, nullifying the implications of the incremental form of *yajña*, means "she whose army is the sacrifice."²² Thus not only does Draupadī's army perform the sacrifice of battle; it is the sacrifice of battle. For Pāñcālī, "she whose army is the sacrifice," these ritual weapons ultimately serve to transform her own demon devotees into her festival army, an army that offers itself to her as did its prototypical leader Pōrmaṇṇaṇ—Pōttu Rāja, alias Mahiṣāsura, the Buffalo Demon, to Durgā. On the one hand, her devotees will be like the Pāṇḍavas, following Pōrmaṇṇaṇ and using his (and her) weapons to win the *Mahābhārata* war. And on the other, following Pōrmaṇṇaṇ's example, they will offer themselves to her as the war's sacrificial victims. Having inherited Mahiṣa's mythology

22. In a performed version of "Eighteenth-Day War" by the Pakkiripālaiyam troupe, Kṛṣṇa also calls her Yākaṭēvi, "Goddess of Sacrifice," just as she comes forth to fulfill the vow that has required the battle-ending death of Duryodhana.

of self-sacrifice to the goddess, Pōrmaṇṇan can thus perform his unique double service as the leader of her army, an army of those who would follow his singular example, whether they are villagers led by his processional icon through the labyrinth of Draupadī cult rituals or the heroes of Kurukṣetra, whose epic stories in the *Terukkūttu* have so often, as we shall now see, been reworked in ways that reflect the special style of his unspoken yet unmistakable marshalship.

18

Kurukṣetra:
The *Mahābhārata* War

As we have seen, the ideal length of a Draupadī festival is eighteen days, a period during which the epic story will be presented (again ideally) by some combination of narrative and dramatization. It is clear that this narrative structure of the festival replicates the eighteen-day war. But the eighteen-day war is also condensed in the ritual scenes that culminate the festival and highlight the ceremonial marshalship of Pōrmannan-Pōttu Rāja. In one case the symbolism of the war is thus extended over many days, while in the other it is condensed to one. In neither case, however, is it possible to present all of the epic's major war episodes. The choice of incidents is thus significant for its selectivity.

Surprisingly the pāratyārs, though they may take thirty or more days to present the "whole" *Mahābhārata*, rarely devote more than three days to the events of the war. From the festival programs of performances by seven pāratyārs, it appears that only three war scenes provide daily headings for recitation and exposition (Piracaṅkam): the deaths of Abhimanyu, Karṇa, and Duryodhana. Less frequent billing falls to the deaths of Bhīṣma and Jayadratha.¹ Because the recitation of the slaying of Duryodhana is presented only in brief form as part of the many rituals orchestrated together on the culminating day of the festival, it is really only the deaths of Abhimanyu and Karṇa, and sometimes that of Bhīṣma, that are singled out for Piracaṅkam.

1. All the following pāratyārs treated the first three topics; I note also their additions: B. Kothandarama Goundar, thirty-two days (1982) at Maṅkaḷam, adding deaths of Bhīṣma and Jayadratha; V. M. Brameesa Mudaliyar, twenty days (1980) at Mānāmpāṭi and twenty-two days (1980) at Iluppakuṇam, at the latter adding the death of Bhīṣma; C. Muttuganesan, thirty-one days (1974), and P. Balagangatharan, thirty-four days (1980), both adding death of Bhīṣma, at Kaḷampūr; P. N. Ratnappa, twenty days (1982) at Mēlcāttamaṅkaḷam; M. C. Venkatesha Bhagavator, thirty-two days (1980) at Kārappaṭtu and twenty days (1980) at Nallānpīlāiperai, adding instruction on the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the beginning of the war (*kitā upatēcamum, pōrtuvakkamum*).

The dramatists (see table 6) nearly always perform two plays: "Karna's Mokṣa" and "Eighteenth-Day War." These dramas present the deaths of Karna and Duryodhana. In festivals of eight to thirteen days, it is common to add "Abhimanyu's Fight." Only in full eighteen-day cycles is one likely to find "Saindhava's Fight," treating of the fourteenth-day war and the slaying of Jayadratha Saindhava in retaliation for the killing of Abhimanyu. Finally there are the more rarely performed war dramas: "Duṣṣāsana's Fight," regularly featured at Tindivanam, and "Bhīṣma's Fight," cited once at Poṇṇūr.²

One thus sees a close correspondence in both the topics selected and the frequency of their performance from the Piracāṅkam to the Terukkūttu. The only noticeable difference is the rare inclusion (at Tindivanam) of "Duṣṣāsana's Fight" in the dramas. But the two performance genres do differ in the accentuation they give to the war incidents. Clearly the battle scenes take up a larger proportion of the total festival performance of the Terukkūttu than they do of the Piracāṅkam. This is no doubt because the dramatic and ritual potential of the death scenes finds a more powerful vehicle in the dramas. In this connection, let us remind ourselves of the tradition that the instruments of death—the war weapons—have in some fashion been provided by Pōrmannan, a figure closely linked with the Terukkūttu whom the pāratiyārs quite regularly spurn. In reverse, the pāratiyārs' greater interest in the figure of Bhīṣma is no doubt related to the role they share with him as great expositors of dharma (see n. 1 above and chap. 7, n. 9).

Because the fall of Bhīṣma was not performed at any of my primary fieldwork sites, and because it is in any case performed so rarely, I will treat it only in passing, reserving fuller discussion for the other dramatized episodes. As with our concentration on "Pōrmannan's Fight," we thus once again take our main cue from the eighteen-day Terukkūttu cycle at Tindivanam. The fights and deaths that are performed in the full eighteen-day festival there will provide our distillation of what is mythically most essential in the Draupadī cult's conception of the eighteen-day war. We are confronted with dramas centered on five heroes: Abhimanyu, Jayadratha, Duṣṣāsana, Karna, and Duryodhana.

At first sight this is a strange group. Yet I note at the outset that the death scenes of four of them are central to a recent interpretation

2. The *Piṣmāccāri Caṅṭai* performed at Poṇṇūr (questionnaire response) is most likely different from the Irattina Nāyakar play, *Pārata Yuttattil Mutalnāl Caṅṭai* (1978), on Bhīṣma's first day of marshalship, which includes his fight with Śveta (see chap. 17, sec. B).

by Biardeau of the culmination of the war. In brief, Biardeau argues that the last five days of battle are modeled on the Aśvamedha, the Vedic horse sacrifice. This is an implicit Aśvamedha in which both sides participate, mirroring each other as alternate sacrificers and victims in a sacrifice that is left symbolically flawed and incomplete, awaiting its resolution and completion in the explicit Aśvamedha that the Pāṇḍavas will perform after the war, in the *Mahābhārata*'s fourteenth book. Thus Jayadratha Saindhava symbolizes the horse that Duryodhana fails to protect. The deaths of Abhimanyu, Duḥśāsana, and Duryodhana are each linked with aspects of the Soma ceremony (pressing and drinking of the *soma* plant) that accompanies the animal sacrifices of the Aśvamedha, aspects that in the cases of Duḥśāsana and Duryodhana are left symbolically incomplete in the ritualized gestures of their slayer, Bhīma. I need not expound further on Biardeau's complex formulation, in which the heroes and incidents just cited have their further complements and mirror images.³ Suffice it to say that while the Draupadī cult dramas and myths do nothing to discourage such an interpretation, and at least in the "somic deaths" seem to enrich or at least play upon such symbolism, they do not seem to rely upon or develop the specifics of an Aśvamedha scenario, and in particular they make no direct connections that I am aware of between Jayadratha and the horse.⁴

In any case, the skein of heroes celebrated in the dramas contrasts sharply with what one might expect from the literary sources. In both the Sanskrit and Tamil versions of the epic, the series of heroes whose fights and deaths define the scansion of the war into its four battle "books," or parvans, is a rather different group: Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Karṇa, and Śalya, the successive marshals of the Kaurava army. In contrast to the prominence the classical traditions give to these four heroes, only one of them—Karṇa—is the subject of a regularly performed Terukkūttu play. Yet it is not that they are ignored. Śalya figures as a subordinate character in "Karṇa's Mokṣa" and in "Eighteenth-Day War," in which he dies. We have seen that plays on Bhīṣma are known but rarely performed. And Droṇa,

3. See Biardeau CR 86, esp. 146–51 (on Jayadratha); CR 87, 147–50 (night battles, overall statement), 150, 170 (on Abhimanyu); CR 88, 179–81 (on Duḥśāsana); CR 89, 240–50 (on Duryodhana); CR 90, 147–52 (on the complementary Aśvamedha of Arjuna); CR 91, 161–62, 166–68 (on Abhimanyu, Duḥśāsana).

4. However, at *Cōlavantāṇ* (see chap. 3, n. 20) Draupadī's processional icon rides a horse to the ritual enactment of Jayadratha's death. Note also that Draupadī will demand the horse-head of Aśvatthāman (see below). Compare the prominence given the Aśvamedha in the Pāṇḍav *Lilās* of Garhwal (chap. 7, above).

despite the fact that neither the pāratyārs nor the dramatists take on his death as a main subject, remains a figure of significance, whose role in the war is the focus of many allusions. For the moment, let me only suggest that his submergence is linked with that of his slayer, Dhṛṣṭadyumna.

The contrast between the drama and the epic texts is not, however, only a matter of degrees of prominence. The principles and concerns that underscore the significance of the four marshals in the Sanskrit epic (see Hildebeitel 1976a, 224–86; cf. Biardeau CR 89: 226–30) are quite different from those that motivate the selection of the figures highlighted in the Terukkūttu. This is most evident on the sociological plane. In the epic, a main theme that runs through the portrayals of the four marshals, and is particularly central in the narratives of their deaths, is their flawed character with respect to the ideology of caste. This theme does not go unnoticed in the dramas. In *Patiṇmunṛām Pōrennum Apimannan Caṇṭai* (henceforth AC), Abhimanyu excoriates Droṇa, the Brahman who takes up Kṣatriya weapons, for abandoning his caste work (*jātitoḷil*): “Only for coolie wages do you come to war. . . . Better [like a Brahman] you should set up a rice mess [*cōttukkatai*, i.e., *cōrukatai*] and serve four persons with banana leaves” (Murukēcapillai 1976, 42–43). Similarly, in *Patiṇēlāmpōr ennum Kaṇa Mōṭa Nāṭakam* (KM) Kaṇa has to endure low-caste slurs—from his wife Poṇṇuruvī, from Śalya, and from Dharma—before the revelation of his Kṣatriyahood to the Pāṇḍavas, his true younger brothers, at the scene of his fratricidal death (1980, 80–86). But though caste confusion and conflict are important in the dramas, they receive no sustained treatment. The sociological thread that ties together the five war dramas is not caste but kinship.

Taking the Pāṇḍava-Kaurava “family” of inheritance cosharers (*paṇkāḷis*) as our basic unit, the situation is as follows (see appendix 1). Within the Tamil kinship system, in which male parallel cousins are classified as brothers, Duryodhana and Duṣṣāsana are brothers to both sides, and are in particular the two most senior brothers of the Kaurava faction. Kaṇa, though the Pāṇḍavas don’t know it until they kill him, is their mother Kuntī’s oldest son, and thus not only their own elder brother but elder brother of the Kauravas as well. Abhimanyu is Arjuna’s son, the most exalted (excepting possibly Aravāṇ, who can be counted here as a “dramatized” war death too) of all the family’s offspring. Jayadratha is the brother-in-law, married to the hundred Kauravas’ only sister, Duṣṣālā. Indeed, in traditional textual terms, he is the only “sister’s husband” (*maitṭuṇṇ*) of the family, as the Pāṇḍavas have no sister in

the classical epic tradition, their sister Caṅkuvati—wife of Pōrmannan—being a folk creation. Since the war plays are generally faithful in outline to the Tamil classical epic tradition, and since Pōrmannan doesn't die anyway, Jayadratha has the singular distinction of being the only such brother-in-law (that is, sister's husband, or maittuṇan) of the entire extended family to die in the war.

There are, of course, other important kinship relations connecting the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas to the four marshals. In addition to Karṇa, Śalya is the Pāṇḍavas' maternal uncle (*māman*), a potentially volatile relationship in Tamil culture,⁵ though primarily one that holds the promise of bestowing one's daughter as bride to the sister's son. The classical *Mahābhārata* gives Śalya no such role, and the Draupadī cult *Mahābhārata* invents no daughters for him either: only a sister's daughter, Caṅkuvati. Indeed, the family feud engages him only ambiguously as a partisan of the Pāṇḍavas who nevertheless fights for the Kauravas. Beyond this, however, the other two marshals are the genetically inoperative "grandfather," Bhīṣma, and the entirely unrelated Brahman, Droṇa. The heroes' relationships to the four marshals thus suggest on the whole that the latter have some relative distance from the kin-defined center of the *Mahābhārata*'s main rivalry. In contrast, the central figures of the dramas are right in the thick of the feud. And that is precisely what the *Mahābhārata* has become in the village eyes that view the Terukkūttu: a royal family feud among paṅkālis over the rights of inheritance. It dwells on the same issue—a *paṅkāli kaccal*, or "fever besetting a group of male descendants"—that Beck (1982, 174) has traced thematically through another creation of the Tamil "folk epic" tradition, the *Elder Brothers Story*.

Indeed, it will also be recalled from "Dice Match and Disrobing" that Draupadī is the Kulateyvam, the lineage deity, of this very family of paṅkālis: the family she marries into. Instead of a confusion of caste, the main abomination for the *Mahābhārata* as a whole, the central issue of the dramas is what the *Bhagavad Gītā* refers to as the prior abomination of the "destruction of the kula," which the *Gītā* itself (1.38–44) regards as the root of caste confusion. The violation of Draupadī by her maittuṇans—her husbands' paṅkālis—has thus set in motion an irreparable conflict in the kula. Furthermore, considering that paṅkāli has also "the sense of a local patrilineal group, whether a lineage or a village" (Trautman 1981, 186), the breach is a fitting metaphor for the violation of a "lineage" or "village" goddess.

5. In the *Elder Brothers Story*, the twins' mother's brothers make all kinds of trouble for her and them (see Beck, n.d.).

A. The First Seventeen Days' War

Turning now to the war plays themselves, I will treat those that concern all but the last day of war synoptically, leaving "Eighteenth-Day War" for a concluding discussion befitting its importance as the culmination of the drama cycle.⁶ The task with the these initial four plays is eased by certain common denominators. For one thing, most of them enrich their stories by bringing women into the action at key points where there is no corresponding involvement in the classical Tamil or Sanskrit epics. The women resist giving the heroes permission to depart for battle. Then, in contrast to the classical epic situation in which the women only come to the battlefield collectively at the war's end, they come individually in the dramas to mourn each hero where he has been slain. Usually the chief figure in such roles is the hero's wife: Abhimanyu's Uttarā (though only in the drama as it was performed), Jayadratha's Duḥśālā, and most interesting of all, Karṇa's wife Poṇṇuruvi, a folk creation whose name seems to mean "Golden Earth."⁷ But such scenes may also involve other women. In "Abhimanyu's Fight" his mother, Subhadrā, bids him farewell and returns with Draupadī to lament him. And in "Karṇa's Mokṣa," Karṇa's mother, Kuntī, comes to be with him at his death. Here again we see the great prominence given to these two Yādava-Kōṇār ladies.

The prominent roles for women serve, of course, to deepen the familial nature of the dramas. But they also draw on traditional South Indian cultural themes. It was apparently a practice for favorite wives and concubines to accompany Vijayanagar kings and other warriors to the battlefield (Mahalingam [1940] 1975, 2: 42–43). Such practices may thus provide background to the Draupadī cult notion that Draupadī accompanies her husbands to Kurukṣetra. Indeed, in some accounts, as we discussed in chapter 13, she makes nightly rounds to devour the corpses of the slain. Sim-

6. Except for "Duḥśāsana's Fight," chapbook versions of all these plays were consulted. A play on this theme titled *Śrī Makāpāratattil Patinēlām Nāl Pōril Turccāṭaṇṇ vatai yennum Karṇaṇ Caṇṭai Nāṭakam*, is listed on the back of some Caṇmukānanta Puttakacālai publications. It contains the scene of Duḥśāsana's death (*vatai*), but it was unobtainable. Most of this discussion, however, is based on observation or informants' descriptions. "Abhimanyu's Fight" (Murukēcappillai 1976) and "Karṇa's Mokṣa" (1980) were seen in shortened versions performed by the Pakkiripālayam troupe in January 1982, as was the concluding scene from "Duḥśāsana's Fight." "Karṇa's Mokṣa" was also seen in festival performance at Tindivanam by the Pompūr troupe on 31 July 1981. For "Saindhava's (or Jayadratha's) Fight" (1980), I rely mainly on the descriptions of my two main dramatist informants.

7. As suggested by Madeleine Biarreau (personal communication).

ilarly, scenes of a doom-sensing woman delaying a hero's leave-taking are a commonplace, not only in other plays, but in both Tamil and Telugu folk epics (Arunachalam 1976, 139; Roghair 1982, 201, 322–31). Finally, although the prominent role of women in scenes of lamentation is something general to Indian culture, it is especially intensified in the traditions of South India (see Beck 1982, 39–47, Roghair 1982, 308–9).

Another common denominator in these plays, or in the folklore they reflect, is the emphasis on the demonic character of the victim. This applies to all (including Duryodhana) except Karna and is conveyed minimally by the gestures and makeup of the actors. In the case of Duṣṣāsana and Jayadratha, Draupadī's two surviving tormentors from earlier scenes (see chap. 11 and chap. 13, sec. A), there is nothing surprising, as these two are already incarnate demons in the classical epic. But the demonization of Abhimanyu involves what looks like a radical transformation. In the Sanskrit epic, Abhimanyu is the incarnation of the splendor (*varcas*) of Soma, a deity who has a certain demonic nature in the Brāhmaṇas (see Lévi 1966, 170; *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 3.4.3.13; 4.2.5.15) but who does not seem to have been construed as such in the epic. In South Indian folklore, however, Abhimanyu is an incarnate demon (Arakkaṇ, Rākṣasa), and Kṛṣṇa, who knows this, schemes the death of his own sister's son.⁸ Indeed, though Kṛṣṇa does this several times over, in this case it concerns the son of his "real" sister Subhadrā, and not of a figurative "sister" like Draupadī or Ulūpī whose relation to him derives from theology, myth, and the extended family (see chaps. 1, 10, 15). The scenario is clear, however, only in performance, as the chapbook version of "Abhimanyu's Fight," remaining close to Villi, includes no such demonization. It is thus in an on-stage aside that Kṛṣṇa tells the Kaṭṭiyaṅkāraṇ that in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Abhimanyu was in a former life a gatekeeper at Rāma's palace and was cursed to become a Rākṣasa when he once refused entry to Durvāsas.⁹ Kṛṣṇa must therefore plot Abhimanyu's death, for he claims the youthful hero is powerful enough to destroy all the Kauravas in a single day and thus prevent the Pāṇḍavas from fulfilling their vows. It is clear that this demonization follows a pattern already set with such other Pāṇḍava sons as Ghaṭotkaca (Bhīma's son by the Rākṣasī Hidimbā), whose death Kṛṣṇa already plots in the *Mahābhārata*, and Aravāṇ. Biardeau has in fact discussed

8. Martha Ashton (personal communication) indicates that Abhimanyu is also a demon in the Yakṣagāna plays of Karnataka.

9. This story is a clear multi-form of the curse that causes Viṣṇu's doorkeepers in Vaikuṇṭha to undergo demon births, one of them becoming Śiśupāla in his last demon form. See above, chap. 11, sec. A.

this sequence of Pāṇḍava sons' deaths, remarking that among them "Abhimanyu alone has escaped the rule" of demonic affinities in the Sanskrit epic (CR 87, 170). His drama no longer exempts him. Moreover, we shall see that the rule is also extended to the five sons of Draupadī.

That Karna stands alone in the war dramas as a nondemonized victim is thus of great significance in understanding the different treatments of these heroes' deaths. Killing scenes, as Turner has written in a comparative study of epic and saga, provide "an epitome or multivocal symbol of the scheme of values underlying the whole work" (Turner, n.d., 7; cf. Hildebeitel 1976a, 37; Blackburn 1981, 1985). Following this terminology, and moving beyond the sociological themes already discussed, one may speak of the "underlying scheme of values" as having two essentially religious facets: sacrifice and bhakti, the latter "englobing" the former.¹⁰ We have already seen these two facets unified in the figure of Pōrmannan, the demonic sacrificial victim turned devotee. But in the war deaths selected for treatment in the Terukkūttu, these themes are divided. The demonic figures remain demonic, and their deaths become vehicles for the reinforcement of familiar sacrificial idioms. In contrast, Karna's nondemonic nature, particularly with regard to his generosity and concealed Kṣatriya identity, becomes a vehicle for the expression of intensified bhakti.

Let us look first, then, at the deaths of the "demons." The scenes are basically as they are in the classical *Mahābhārata*, but in each case there is a new twist. And in each case, the innovation can be traced to "sacrificial" motifs that are now familiar not only from the mythology of the goddess but, if we are on the right track, from the legacy of Pōttu Rāja.

As in the Sanskrit epic, Abhimanyu's fight occurs during Droṇa's marshalship of the Kaurava army, on the thirteenth day of battle. Droṇa seeks to satisfy Duryodhana by capturing Dharma in a circular battle array (*cakravyūha*, Tamil *cakkiraviyūkam*; AC, 9), and he contrives to force Dharma's exposure by stationing bands of warriors sworn to fight to their doom against Arjuna—and also against Bhīma in the dramas—at a distant part of the battlefield.¹¹ There

10. I follow here terminology and insights developed by Biardeau, especially 1981c, 1981d, and Biardeau and Malamoud 1976 (summarized in Hildebeitel 1983).

11. In Sanskrit the warriors are called the Saṁśaptakas, "those sworn together"; the chapbook calls them Cañcayattārs, led by one Cañcayar (AC, 14–15), and in performance the leader's name sounded like Cañcayakkartaṇ. According to one of the actors of the Pakkripālaiyam troupe, the latter's body is made of bell metal; a Rākṣasa, his followers number twelve thousand Rākṣasas. Bhīma is detained in the drama by the Kalingas (AC, 14).

they will be unable to lend Dharma any support. Kṛṣṇa, scheming in turn, convinces Bhīma and the highly reluctant Arjuna to accept the challenge against them, and to leave the youthful Abhimanyu—Arjuna's son, Kṛṣṇa's nephew, only sixteen years old and just married—as Dharma's protector (AC, 8–34; cf. Hiltebeitel 1976a, 339–45).

Following the Sanskrit epic, Abhimanyu outpoints all the great Kaurava warriors in single combat but is finally drawn into the circular array. Here, however, his death is not caused by being pounded on the head with a mace, a killing by which the epic poets evoke Abhimanyu's identity as the incarnation of the "splendor" of Soma, the god whose plant form is pounded to yield the Vedic *soma*, the elixir of immortality (Hiltebeitel 1976a, 341; Biardeau CR 87, 150; 1978, 168). Rather, in an innovation traceable at least to Villiputtūr, he is overcome by a garland, the *koṇṛaimālai*. The *koṇṛai* is the Indian laburnum whose flowers may be used for Śivapūjās (Winslow [1862] 1979, s.v.), but the sense in which it is explained in performance is as *koṇṛa-mālai*, the "slaying garland," from the verbal root *kol*, "to kill." Jayadratha Saindhava (Cayintavan) has been granted this garland, among other boons, from Śiva to exact revenge against the Pāṇḍavas for his humiliation at their hands after his abduction of Draupadī. It is noteworthy that Villiputtūr has Jayadratha obtain not only the garland but the mace to be used in the actual killing. In Villi (7.3.49–58), Jayadratha prevents Abhimanyu and Bhīma from crossing over the garland to join forces. He saves the mace (*katai*, Sanskrit *gadā*) for the blow that finally severs (*tuṇi*), rather than crushes, Abhimanyu's head (7.3.118–29). Here we see already the replacement of one sacrificial idiom by another, a process that the Terukkūttu now continues.

When Jayadratha throws the garland "over" Abhimanyu (as its trajectory is described in performance) it encircles his feet like an anklet (*taṇṭaiyai*; AC, 71) and immobilizes him. While he weeps, he is disarmed: supposedly by the weapons of his foes, but actually through the slow removal of his own armor—epaulettes, chest piece, and crown—and all the while he sings in the fashion of a dirge. Finally, unable to move, he requests just one small weapon to continue his fight, and Karna, pretending charity, throws a little sword at his feet. When he bends to pick it up, his adversaries cut off his legs and arms at the knees and elbows.

In spite of having no hands or feet, Abhimanyu decides to finish off his foes. The earth, he says, is only an *ammi*, a horizontal grinding stone. He will be the *kuḷavi*, the grinding pestle or roller, and grind everyone on earth to death (the chapbook calls up the

same image when it has Duryodhana say that Abhimanyu "ground [us] as one would mash [into a paste] in an *ammi*" (*ammikulaiyāy araittān*; AC, 79). Three battalions (Sanskrit *akṣauhiṇīs*) of Duryodhana's army have come to kill Abhimanyu. He now crushes them all, "like a cudgel to new pots, like a pestle to ascetics and siddhas" (*putupāṇṭarikaḷukku oru taṭiyaip pōlum tapacittarkku ulakkaiyaip pōlum*; AC, 78).¹² All this is performed with a most difficult acrobatic dance maneuver that involves the actor drawing in his arms and legs and rapidly swirling around the stage-ground for a considerable period (cf. Frasca 1984, 309). Abhimanyu is only killed when Droṇa finally steps forth to cut off his head—with a sword.

The drama's transformation of the sacrificial idiom is thus achieved by two primary innovations: the new use for the garland and the new theme of the grinding stone. In the first case, we no doubt have an evocation of the garland that is offered to animal victims prior to their sacrifice. In fact, clay images of Abhimanyu's brother Aravāṇ are garlanded in the ritual enactment of his sacrifice: a coincidence that recalls further similarities in the symbolism of these two sons of Arjuna, whose deaths, as substitutes for his, would seem to evoke the sacrifice of Puruṣa not only in the numerology of their sixteen years, but in their dismemberments.

But the most intriguing innovation of the dramas is Abhimanyu's transformation into a grinding stone. Rather than being pounded to death by the sacrificial mace in the style of the Sanskrit epic, or beheaded by it after the fashion of Villiputtūr, he himself becomes the macelike grinding stone that crushes the three Kaurava divisions. He is thus transformed from the Soma victim pounded by the mace to a multiform of the mace itself. The murderous capacity of the grinding stone provides, of course, an ultimate confirmation of Abhimanyu's new demonic vocation. But as an instrument of sacrificial death, it has still more specific resonances.

Biardeau (in press)—looking in the direction of Pōta Rāju—has already noted correspondences between the *ammi* and *kuḷavi* and other sacrificial "instruments of killing." We are led further in this direction by Brahma Nāyudu's promise in the *Epic of Palnāḍu* that Pōta Rāju will always be present at threshing floors and places where grain is stored: a context that also has to do with the "violent" preparation of grains (see chap. 16, sec. B; and Roghair 1982,

12. Indira Peterson (personal communication) suggests the odd second comparison may allude to the *Mausalaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*, in which the mistreatment of ascetics provokes a fight with clubs (*mausalas*). Note also that *kuḷavi* can mean "child," which is fitting for Abhimanyu, while *ammi* can mean "mother."

213). There seems to be as well a correlation between the threshing floor and the battlefield in Tamil traditions. Thus, as we have noted in chapter 15, prominent words for “battlefield” like *pōrkaḷam* and *paṭukaḷam*—in the Draupadī cult, the domain of Pōrmannan-Pōttu Rāja—contain the term *kaḷam*, which itself can mean both “battlefield” and “threshing floor” (Burrow and Emeneau 1961, 98).¹³

More specifically, one finds that the ammi and kuḷavi are sometimes placed outside the Pōttu Rāja maṇḍapa during Draupadī festivals (as observed at Tindivanam and Pondicherry). It thus seems quite likely that Abhimanyu has appropriated the kuḷavi, the more phallic and destructive of the pair, from Pōttu Rāja’s arsenal of cultic paraphernalia.

The death of Jayadratha Saindhava follows classical sources somewhat more closely, but the play still introduces important new thematic and dramatic effects. Distraught over Abhimanyu’s death, Arjuna has vowed to kill Jayadratha before sunset on the fourteenth day of battle or, should he fail, to kill himself by entering fire.¹⁴ Duryodhana, knowing this, hides Jayadratha under the musicians’ platform and sits on top of it. Jayadratha is also screened from Arjuna’s view by a curtain. Using his cakra, Kṛṣṇa then conceals the petromax stage lamp to create the illusion that the sun has set. When Arjuna concludes that he has failed to fulfill his vow, he prepares the fire for his suicide and is joined—in one of the play’s innovations—by Draupadī, who says she will not live without him. Only after they have completed the three tours of the fire preparatory to entering it (recalling the Draupadī cult’s firewalking rite) does Kṛṣṇa appear to straighten things out. He asks Arjuna whether he will resume his efforts to kill Jayadratha if the sun is still shining, and when Arjuna says yes, Kṛṣṇa removes the cakra, leaving Arjuna three hours of daylight. Meanwhile, thinking that Arjuna’s vow has aborted, Duryodhana rejoices and lets Jayadratha peep out, upon which Arjuna beheads him with one of his arrows.

To this point, excepting the departures and stage devices just described, the drama stays close to its epic models. Were it to continue to follow the Sanskrit epic, Arjuna would heed Kṛṣṇa’s

13. Meyer (1984, 59–62) has also found the two grinding stones, and especially the kuḷavi, associated with Aṅkāḷamman: a correlation extending from the grinding stones to the cremation ground to the battlefield, which is aligned with the crematorium in numerous Aṅkāḷamman myths. Cf. Dumont 1957, 75–77, on both the ammi and kuḷavi and the ulakkai pestle cited above; and for Vedic background, see Heesterman 1985, 89.

14. *Mbh.* 7.51.37; *CC*, 29: *akkiṇippiravēcam*, Sanskrit *agnipraveśa* (informants often use the Tamil form to refer to firewalking).

advice and relay the head with his arrows into the lap of Jayadratha's father, Vṛddhakṣatra, who is engaged near Kurukṣetra in a penance that assures that if anyone causes his son's head to touch the ground, the slayer's head will burst to pieces. When the meditating Vṛddhakṣatra inadvertently allows the head to fall from his own lap, it is his head that explodes rather than Arjuna's (*Mbh.* 7.121.17–33). Villi, trimming the story to one verse, gives no name for the father. Arjuna again guides the head with his arrows, but when the father drops the head it is from his "golden hand," which he is holding out to offer water to his ancestors (*taruppitta*) at a tank or pond (*taṭa*, *taṭākam*) near Kurukṣetra (Villi 7.4.167). Clearly relying on Villi, but reopening the story to wider associations, the drama develops the scene differently.

Jayadratha's father, Cintupūpati or Cintumāṇṇa (in either case, "King of the Sindhus"), is doing penance standing in the water at the bank of a river near the battlefield. He prays to Śiva that if anyone severs his son's head, it will come into his own hands; and further, if he holds on to the head, he will recover his own lost strength a thousandfold. Here, though Cintupūpati has lost his Sanskrit name (no doubt thanks to Villi's omission), his story may rely upon its meaning, for Vṛddhakṣatra as "Old Kṣatra" would seem to signify not only an aging king but a representative of the "old Kṣatriya order" that Kṛṣṇa is bound to remove from the earth (see Biardeau 1978, 169). In any case, knowing of his penance, Kṛṣṇa has come each day in the form of a child and mischievously thrown a stone into his hand. Each day Cintupūpati drops the stone, muttering in irritation. Now, while Arjuna guides the head towards Cintupūpati, Kṛṣṇa keeps throwing more stones, and when the head arrives—again a wadded ball of cloth—Cintupūpati fumbles it, lets it drop into the water, and thus loses his own head, which explodes into a thousand pieces.

Clearly the innovations in this portion of the drama are closely intertwined thematically with the mythology of Pōrmanṇa. Indeed, as we have noted, in Draupadī cult mythology Pōrmanṇa and Jayadratha are the only brothers-in-law (or more precisely, younger sisters' husbands) of the Kaurava-Pāṇḍava set of paṅkālīs. More than this, however, their cult-based myths have a transparent symmetrical relation to each other. In many respects, they are exact parallels. In each case the marriage poses dangers to the Pāṇḍavas, for no matter which side the son is on, the father favors the Kauravas. Furthermore, each father does penance to Śiva, is his great devotee, and is linked with a kingdom, or "old Kṣatriya order," that must be destroyed. In both stories there is also at least a variant

that specifically locates the father's tapas in the water. In each case a trick by Kṛṣṇa—executed in collaboration with Arjuna—results in the son being the cause of the father's death. Finally, in one case the father is a multiform of a demon who can lose and replenish up to a hundred or a thousand heads so long as there is no one to keep the last one from dropping. And in the other, the father seeks to regain his strength a thousandfold by holding his son's head, only to have his own head burst into a thousand pieces when he is forced to drop it himself.

Equally interesting, however, are the major points of inversion. Pōrmaṇṇaṇ holds his father's head successfully, and in keeping it from touching the ground, he prevents disaster. This situation is reversed in the death of Jayadratha, where the father holds the son's head, but only momentarily and unsuccessfully, allowing disaster to occur. Thanks to Kṛṣṇa, the avoidance of disaster in Pōrmaṇṇaṇ's case and the occurrence of disaster in Jayadratha's both turn out favorably for the Pāṇḍavas. It would be interesting to speculate on the significance of these inversions. How is it that it is favorable for the son to hold the father's head, but unfavorable for the father to hold the son's? Is there a negative evaluation here of the classical epic theme of fathers' rejuvenating themselves at the expense of their sons (e.g., the Yayāti story), or even of the folk theme, attested in the Arcots, of the sacrifice of firstborn sons?¹⁵ And what is there in both stories that is so potentially threatening about the younger sisters' husbands' fathers and their "Śaivite" *anciens régimes*? Answers to these complex questions have eluded me. Perhaps others will find them in related folklores.¹⁶ For the present I will simply observe that it is once again Pōttu Rāja—this time through his mythology as Pōrmaṇṇaṇ—who makes intelligible the Draupadī cult's transformation of a death at Kurukṣetra.

15. At Mēlaccēri, informants indicated that until it was prohibited by British law, mantravādis used to sacrifice firstborn sons (*talaccam piḷḷai*) to obtain their skulls for use in magic (cf. chap. 6).

16. One finds comparable but disjointed elements in the stories about Mūga Rāju, the "Mute King," in the *Epic of Palnāḍu*: Once Ankāmma violently converts the Śaivite city of Kalyāṇ to her worship, his marriage of the Kalyāṇ princess Muvarēkka creates a similar situation to the patricide of Pōrmaṇṇaṇ. When Mūga Rāju returns to his natal kingdom of Devagiri, he does not remember his father and three brothers and kills them (Roghair 1982, 194–204). Pōrmaṇṇaṇ's father's name is given, not with three sons, but with three preceding "lingams" in the ancestral male line. The converted Śaivite kingdom and the kingdom of Mūga Rāju's father are separate rather than identical, as they are in "Pōrmaṇṇaṇ's Fight"; and unlike Caṅkuvati, Muvarēkka has no elder brothers who might benefit from her husband's patricide. But the "Mute King's" story still has the earmarks of a variation on the proverbial stupidity of the "Buffalo King."

With the killing of Duḥśāsana, the discussion of the sacrificial themes in the deaths of the demonic heroes comes momentarily to a close, as I leave Duryodhana's death for later. My two main dramatist informants confirm the findings of table 6 that Duḥśāsana's play is performed very rarely. My only information on it (see n. 6) is their skeletal description of the first three scenes and their staging of the fourth and last scene at my request. First, on the seventeenth day of battle, Draupadī and Dharma appear and recall the incidents of "Dice Match and Disrobing": Duḥśāsana's outrages and Bhīma's resultant vow to drink Duḥśāsana's blood. Then the five Pāṇḍavas gather to spur Bhīma on. Next, Duryodhana meets with Duḥśāsana to caution him and say farewell (for once a doomed hero seems to have no clairvoyant wife). Finally comes "Duḥśāsana's Fight," the title episode of the play.

This single scene is sufficient to reinforce my central point. When Bhīma kills Duḥśāsana and takes up his blood to fulfill his vow of drinking it, Kṛṣṇa intervenes. He says if Bhīma drinks the blood, he will go mad and won't know his brothers or his wife. So Bhīma offers the blood to his father, Vāyu Bhāgavan (the god of wind), and casts it to the wind with the vow that not a drop will touch the ground. The "blood" is a handful of ashes.

This remarkable scene has many echoes. Let us note, however, that the drama follows a line of tradition that has toned down the episode's violence. When we examine the rituals of the Draupadī cult, we shall see that an alternate tradition, which has intensified the violence and left Bhīma to slake his thirst for Duḥśāsana's blood to the full, has also been registered. Both traditions can be traced to the ambiguity of the scene in the *Mahābhārata*, which has Bhīma revel in the taste of the blood (sweeter than his mother's milk) when he kills Duḥśāsana (8.61.7) but later claim that he checked himself from actually swallowing it (11.14.14–15). Biardeau (CR 91, 166) sees this claim as a sign that the Soma sacrifice, which would form part of what she regards as the epic war's symbolic Aśva-medha, has been left incomplete (see n. 3). The play, however, no doubt picks up on the tradition of hesitancy more directly from the *Villipāratam*, in which after Bhīma begins to chop off the ten fingers of Duḥśāsana that touched Draupadī's hair and readies himself to drink his blood, Kṛṣṇa appears to prevent him and gets him to "gargle" with it instead (8.2.159–61; Subramanian 1967, 269).

But the drama's innovation is all the more striking in light of these variations. For one thing, Bhīma's offering of the "blood" to Vāyu calls to mind the archaic Indo-Iranian and apparently para-Vedic combination of cultic and mythic themes that seem to con-

verge in the epic figure of Bhīma: the sacrificial violence, largely lost in later Hinduism, associated with Vāyu; the "bloody club" (like Bhīma's mace) as a symbol of the pre-Avestan Haoma (Soma) cult, in which the Soma drink transformed its *Männerbund* ("men's society") partakers into "wolves"; and Vāyu's sharing of the Soma drink and protection of the Soma in the *R̥g Veda* (Hiltebeitel 1976a, 341).¹⁷ Of all the war's "somic deaths," only Duṣśāsana's—specifically, the drinking of his blood—is linked explicitly with the Soma in the Sanskrit epic. As Karna says to Kṛṣṇa before the *Mahābhārata* war, Duṣśāsana will be the Soma drink in the great sacrifice of battle (5.139.47; cf. Hiltebeitel 1982b, 91; Biardeau CR 91, 166).

This is not to say that these archaic Indo-European resonances are directly felt in the drama. Rather, it is the purified Vāyu of Hinduism who receives the purified blood in the form of ashes. Here, however, one is more immediately reminded of a ritual gesture known to many South Indian goddess temples: the throwing of blood-rice into the air, if not to the wind, at the temple corners or other ritual boundaries to satisfy potentially malevolent demons or ghosts. This "unpurified blood" must also not fall to the ground, as the ghosts and demons are supposed to devour it (see, e.g., Meyer 1984, 149, 162, 227 n. 2). At Draupadī temples, and most notably at Dindigul where it was described in an early nineteenth-century Mackenzie manuscript, this rite is sometimes connected with a midnight cult to Aravāṇ, who may have an icon of his head placed on one of the corners of the temple (as at Tūci, Mēlcāta-maṅkaḷam, and Cantirampāṭi; see plate 15) or on the temple wall (as at Kanchipuram).¹⁸

But most transparently, the combination of blood-drinking (whether completed or not) and preventing blood from touching the ground reminds us once again of Pōttu Rāja (see Biardeau CR 88, 181). Yet it is not so much the Pōttu Rāja of the Draupadī cult, who must only prevent a severed head, not its blood, from touching the ground. Rather it is the Potrāj who bites the jugular of the sacrificial goat, or Reṇukā's Pōta Rāju, who spreads his tongue to drink up the blood drops of the Rākṣasas to keep them from regenerating. More generally, we have noted that this varied blood-drinking feature of the cult of Pōta Rāju is recurrently associated with goat sacrifices that are preliminary to buffalo sacrifices. It

17. On the violence of Vāyu, see Wikander 1947, 33–36, translated in Dumézil 1948, 44–48; also Dumézil 1974, 47–48, 58, 64–65. The "wolves" of the *Männerbund* recall Bhīma's name "Wolf-belly." See chap. 6 and Wikander 1938, 58–66.

18. See Mahalingam 1971, 104; the same practice was also described at the Mēlcāta-maṅkaḷam Draupadī temple.

would seem that in transforming real animal sacrifices into symbolic enactments of the *Mahābhārata*'s sacrifice of battle, the Draupadī cult treats the killing of Duḥśāsana as just such a preliminary rite: a blood-drinking reminiscent of the specific form of goat sacrifice (see Hildebrandt 1982b, 90–95) that precedes the grand oblation of his elder brother, Duryodhana.

Before moving on, it is instructive to observe how differently—and yet similarly—this episode is treated in the cult of Bhīma and Draupadī among the Newars in Nepal, a cult that, as we noted at the beginning of chapter 7, involves real goat and buffalo sacrifices. There, as often elsewhere, Draupadī's vow is to dress her hair not with Duryodhana's blood but with Duḥśāsana's.¹⁹ And in what seems to be the culminating scene in the cult's folk *Mahābhārata*, when Bhīma decapitates Duḥśāsana, two spouts of blood shoot forth from the wound. From one Bhīma drinks, and in the other Draupadī washes her hair. Here too, the traditional story, in which the blood is cupped from Duḥśāsana's chest, seems to have been skewed toward a specific rite of blood-drinking. But it is not Pōttu Rāja who provides Bhīma's model. Viewing Bhīma's "demonic behavior" with alarm, Arjuna calls Kṛṣṇa, "who recognized at once that Bhimsen [Bhīma] had taken the form of the wrathful Bhairab [Bhairava], the God of Terror who sips blood from a skull cap and shares it with goddess Bhairabi [Bhairavi], his female counterpart, now seen as the Pandavas' wife Draupadi. At this revelation, both Arjun and Lord Krishna fall down before the divine couple in adoration" (Anderson 1971, 235). In the Tamil Draupadī cult, it would be unthinkable that Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna should bow before this Tantric vision of Bhīma and Draupadī receiving spouts of blood from a decapitated trunk. As we have seen, it is Kṛṣṇa who intervenes to prevent the actual blood-drinking. Yet we must note that the Bhairava whom Bhīma impersonates is closer to Pōttu Rāja than the Nepali folk epic alone would allow: Nepal knows such festivals as the Bhairavi-Rath-Yatra in which a priest (*dhāmi*) who impersonates Bhairava drinks blood from the throats of numerous goats and buffaloes (Visuvalingam 1985a, 15). Nor should we forget that Bhairava himself may be represented as an Aravāṇ-like head or that the various tasks of the head-holding Pōttu Rāja and the blood-drinking Potrāj are combined in Bhairava's dog, which laps the blood that drops from the human head Bhairava has severed.

19. See plate 4 and chap. 2, n. 16; for further South Indian examples, see Hildebrandt 1981, 179 n. 3; for Indonesian examples, in otherwise quite different "folk epics," see Ulbricht 1970, 78, 81; van Ness and Prawirohardjo 1980, 24.

Although here we compare representations of Bhairava and Pōttu Rāja that are thousands of miles apart, it is the crossover of their cults, iconographies, and mythologies at the Draupadī cult's regional level that will provide an important key to understanding what remains, after "Karna's Mokṣa," of the Draupadī cult *Mahābhārata*.

So far, however, and more immediately, it should not be surprising that the sacrificial deaths of the Draupadī cult's demon heroes are recast in images replicated in, and probably drawn from, the stories of Aravāṇ and Pōttu Rāja. Ritually, and thus mythically as well, these two figures preside over the *Mahābhārata* war: Aravāṇ by watching it with his severed head, Pōttu Rāja (or Pōrmanṇan) by leading the Pāṇḍava army (see plate 27) or standing guard outside the battlefield fort with a head in his hand. Their sacrifices, themselves multiforms of each other, are thus exemplary for the sacrificial deaths of the other demon heroes. In contrast to the more purely demonic deaths of Abhimanyu, Jayadratha, and Duḥśāsana, the sacrificial themes in the stories of Aravāṇ and Pōttu Rāja are ultimately turned toward bhakti. Aravāṇ dedicates himself to Kālī, and Pōttu Rāja dedicates himself to Draupadī. On an even higher devotional plane, they each also submit themselves to the goddess, whether willingly (Aravāṇ) or unwittingly (Pōrmanṇan), through the schemes and designs of Kṛṣṇa.²⁰ These devotional themes are not found in the deaths of Abhimanyu, Jayadratha, or Duḥśāsana. In the war plays, it is the death of Karna that gives them their first—unless we count the rarely performed "Bhīṣma's Fight"—and fullest expression.

The death of Karna has undergone a thorough reworking in the Tamil tradition, the outcome of which is a rich devotional piece. In effect, it presents Kṛṣṇa in an additional theophany. This bhakti reworking is at least as old as the *Villipāratam*, where the themes are poignantly and beautifully rendered.²¹ The drama follows Villi closely in design, but introduces its own important innovations.

It is now later in the seventeenth day of battle. I will not dwell here on the fratricidal killing theme, the complications in the relationships between Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa on one chariot and Karna

20. On Kṛṣṇa's theological rank above the goddess, see further the discussion of the death of Karna, and also chaps. 11 and 19.

21. My thanks to C. Jagannathachariar for his help in going over this passage with me and making this devotional richness clear. Cf. Shulman 1985, 380–400. A likeminded but narratively different handling in the Kannaḍa *Mahābhārata* of Kumāra Vyāsa suggests the possibility of earlier variant sources (see Subramanian 1967, 274–75).

and Śalya on the other, or for that matter the progress of the chariot duel itself. The drama develops most of these complex matters in ways that depart little from what is essential in the Sanskrit epic.²² Let me only mention that the enactment of combat by chariots is as far as I have seen unique in the dramas, and strikingly beautiful: the warriors exchange places standing on the musicians' bench brandishing their weapons and fighting the opponents who dance on the stage below them. And while each warrior stands in turn on the chariot-bench, his charioteer sits beneath him, Śalya making gestures of holding the chariot reins, and the blue-faced Kṛṣṇa, smiling and mysterious as ever, playing the flute.

The important innovations begin when Karna has fallen to Arjuna's final onslaught. When Kṛṣṇa sees him lying back against his chariot, he perceives that Karna will not die because he is spiritually protected: by his virtue (*tarmam*) in the play (KM, 69–71), by his merits (*puṇṇiyam*) in Villi (8.2.239–40). There, for what seems an eternity on stage, Karna must grasp Arjuna's arrow as it "melts" (*uruki*; KM, 68) into his chest.²³ Seeing Karna in this agonizing impasse, Kṛṣṇa decides to disguise himself as a Brahman to put Karna's vaunted generosity to the test once again.²⁴ While Karna lies dying, Kṛṣṇa will appear before him to beg all his virtues.

In extremis, Karna has nothing else to give, but his virtues are his promise and security of a favorable afterlife. Still, he is willing to give them unflinchingly to the mendicant Brahman. In the *Vil-lipāratam*, he sanctifies this offering with the blood from his heart (8.2.241); in the play, with *tīrtha* water produced miraculously, at Kṛṣṇa's suggestion, from his little finger (KM, 71). The mendicant

22. See Hiltebeitel 1982c, 1985b; the major exception is that the play does not include the sinking of Karna's chariot wheel, a theme already attenuated in Villi (8.2.232–34).

23. The arrow is unnamed, but as Arjuna shoots no other arrow after it, it must be the same "final" arrow he uses elsewhere: the Añjalika (*Mbh.* 8.67.19–20) or Añcarika (Villi 8.2.252). Evoking the *añjali*, or cupped hands, it is fitting that as Arjuna's final gesture to Karna it should reverently "melt" his heart (cf. Hiltebeitel 1982c, 107–8). In the Tindivanam performance, however, the prop used for this "arrow" was Arjuna's wooden sword, which Karna held as if he had impaled himself. A long-standing tradition in Karnataka art and folklore, possibly traceable to eighth-century Western Chalukyan art and at least as old as the tenth-century Pampa *Bhāratam*, has Pārvatī give the Añjalika to Arjuna at the scene of his tapas, after Śiva gives the Pāśupata (see Nagaraja Rao 1979, esp. 7, 18, 22). But our Draupadi cult sources do not know this story (see chap. 12).

24. As in the episode—referred to but not performed in the drama cycle, though well known through the Piracāṅkam recitations—where Indra, to protect his son Arjuna, disguises himself as a Brahman to beg Karna's earrings and natural-born coat of mail.

then embraces him, and promises Karna that he will attain *mokṣa*, release from rebirth, or full salvation. At this point the dying Karna is blessed with the sight of God. In Villi (8.2.244–245) the mendicant reveals himself to be Nārāyaṇa, wearing the *tulasi* garland, his five weapons in his hands, and mounted on Garuḍa.²⁵ In the drama, the mendicant disappears, and “Mahāviṣṇu”—that is, Kṛṣṇa—arrives to the song “The one who rides Garuḍa comes, searching for Kurukṣetra. The one who rides Garuḍa comes . . .” (*keruṭavākaṇar vantār kurukṣēttiram tēti . . .*; KM, 72). In brief, the names Nārāyaṇa and Mahāviṣṇu refer in each context to the ultimate salvific form of Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu.²⁶ Kṛṣṇa extols Karna’s magnanimous gift and grants him access to Vaikuṇṭha, the paradisaal equivalent of *mokṣa*. Karna then sings Viṣṇu’s praises and counts his blessings at having seen the Lord’s feet before death and gained liberation from future births.²⁷ According to Frasca’s informants, in “dying” the performer “slips momentarily into a catatonic-like state,” a possession, though “not a violent one” like the possessions in earlier plays (1984, 312).

“Karna’s Mokṣa” does not end here, as Karna is the most lamented hero of the war: first by Kuntī, then by the Pāṇḍavas, by Duryodhana, by Poṇṇuruvi and Viśvaketu (her son with Karna), and finally by Poṇṇuruvi’s mother.²⁸ The lamentation scenes have certain ritual corollaries. For one thing, the Pāṇḍavas now bear off Karna’s body and prepare his funeral ceremony (KM, 86). In the Sanskrit epic, Karna’s body lies on the battlefield with the rest to be lamented after the war in the *Strī Parvaṇ*, the “Book of the Women” (11.21). The performance thus gives play to such arrangements as those at Tindivanam, where low-caste Paṇicayvaṇs, specialists in blowing conchs at funerary services, sponsor the drama, implicitly dedicating their services to the ritual-performing Pāṇḍavas. Similarly, at the end of the play the public is reminded of the munificent marriage gifts that Poṇṇuruvi had been given by her father, Poṇṇuruvirājan, “King of the Golden Earth,” and is

25. The five weapons are the conch, wheel, mace, sword (*vāl*), and bow. On Garuḍa, he appears as he did to the elephant Gajendra as the latter was about to be slain by the crocodile.

26. In the dramas Kṛṣṇa is often called Mahāviṣṇu in scenes where he acts most mysteriously and ambiguously: for instance when he takes the form of a baby to throw stones into Cintupūpati’s lap, or when he stops Bhima from drinking Duḥśāsa’s blood.

27. He says he has been released from seven births (*elu jenmamum nīṅkivittēṇ*; KM, 73; cf. Villi 8.2.246–50).

28. Kuntī’s breasts lactate for the dead Karna in *Villipāratam* 8.2.256–57 (see Shulman 1985, 347), but not in the chapbook drama (see chap. 14, n. 9).

invited to match them to support her now that she has become a widow. It is, of course, a device to coax donations from the audience, this being the penultimate play and the last one that allows for such an appeal at its end. But more than this, every donor can in effect be a mahārāja, a "King of the Golden Earth," for just a rupee—or even less. Indeed, since Terukkūttu audiences normally face east, it is the golden earth that one sees ever more clearly as the death of Karna, the son of the Sun, and the appeal for offerings to his widow are staged against the background of the rising sun.

Finally, however, the most important thrust of the play is its insistence that no matter where one begins in the caste hierarchy, mokṣa is accessible to one and all. Villified in the course of the play by Ponnuruvi, Śalya, and Dharma for his reputed low caste (KM, 10–16, 33–36, 50), Karna dies recognized by one and all as a true Kṣatriya, the model for those in the audience who claim their own suppressed Kṣatriya identities (see chap. 3). This teaching of the universal accessibility of mokṣa through bhakti, with the Kṣatriya as its model, is of course a traditional message of the *Mahābhārata* itself (see Biardeau 1981b), and of the *Bhagavad Gītā* in particular. The placing of this message on the penultimate morning of a festival to a village or lineage goddess is especially significant, for it undercuts the view—maintained by Hinduism's Brahmanical elite and by scholars who follow their cue—that the festivals of such goddesses are concerned only with this-worldly ills and blessings. To be sure, it is Kṛṣṇa and not the goddess who bestows Karna's mokṣa. But this salvation is the outcome of Kṛṣṇa's service to the goddess: not only to Draupadī, but to the goddess Earth. One must therefore be careful not to separate out single theological strands from the rich and complex whole. Nor, finally, should one push the polarization of sacrifice and bhakti any further than has been done here. These two "poles" come together not only in Aravāṇ and Pōttu Rāja at the beginning of the war, but, as we shall see, in Duryodhana at its end. In this vein, let us retain the image of Mahāviṣṇu arriving on Garuḍa, and let us also recall that the death of Aravāṇ is similarly attended by Garuḍa's arrival. It is not accidental that this solar bird—in Tamilnadu generally identified as the white-headed Brahmany kite—shows a predatory character when it appears at scenes that fuse the imageries of bhakti and sacrificial death.

B. "Eighteenth-Day War"

Draupadī-amman festivals may begin their drama cycles from a number of points, but one play almost always concludes them:

"Eighteenth-Day War" (Kuruṣṇappillai 1980, henceforth *PP*).²⁹ When the last blessings are over at its end, it will be the morning of the festival's culminating day, the day on which the drama cycle finally fuses itself with the fully intensified current of ritual. In its orchestration of drama, Piracāṅkam, and ritual around these war-closing scenes, and in the complex of firewalking myths and rites that follow them, the Draupadī cult gives its final performative statement on the significance of the battle of Kurukṣetra. In the remainder of this chapter, and in the next, we must thus keep in mind certain themes that have hung unresolved since Pōrmaṇṇaṇ "arrived" at the battlefield: most notably his double evocation of the mythologies of the Buffalo Demon and the head of Brahmā, and the tendency of the first seventeen days' war to split the roles of demon and devotee. I note for now that although Pōrmaṇṇaṇ is not brought into the mythology of these closing dramas, he is prominent at the rituals that enact them. I will thus, once again, explore the impact of his tacit ritual presence in the ways these epic scenes are brought to life.

As with the eighteenth-day battle in classical epic traditions, the play opens with the deaths of Śalya and Śakuni, the two maternal uncles of the Pāṇḍava-Kaurava group of paṅkālis. First Śalya, the Pāṇḍavas' maternal uncle (*tāy-māmaṇ*: he is the brother of the twins' mother, Mādrī) is slain by Dharma, and then Śakuni (the brother of the Kauravas' mother, Gāndhārī) is beheaded by Nakula (*PP*, 20–26). Let us note only two innovations. First, to convince Dharma that it is justifiable to kill Śalya, Kṛṣṇa (in performed versions) reassures him by recalling as precedent the killing of his own maternal uncle Kāṁsa. Thus another link is forged between the "two biographies" of Kṛṣṇa (see chap. 9, sec. A). Second, traditionally Sahadeva, not Nakula, slays Śakuni (*Mbh.* 9.27.57; Villi 9.97). Indeed, in "Dice Match and Disrobing," it is Sahadeva who vows to kill him. The two chapbook authors have thus introduced a discordance. In any case, these deaths are effective in stripping Duryodhana of support. With these two allies gone, and particularly without Śakuni to counter the ploys of Kṛṣṇa, Duryodhana is very much alone and desperate, and he has no more kings to lead his army (see Biardeau CR 89, 239).

With no hope of victory and nowhere to turn, he anxiously traverses the stage with the Kaṭṭiyaṅkāraṇ, twice nearly tripping

29. See table 6. Full festival versions of this play were observed twice: by the Pakkiriṭpālaiyam troupe in August 1977 at Tindivanam, and by the Ciṇṇakaram troupe in May 1982 at Mēlaccēri. Shortened versions by the Pakkiriṭpālaiyam troupe were also seen in January 1982 at Pakkiriṭpālaiyam and April 1982 at Ciṇṇapāpucamuttiram.

over the dead body of Śakuni (at this point in the performance at Pakkiri-pālaiyam, the jester pulled some crumpled paper out of Śakuni's rear end). Duryodhana thinks of hiding in the mountain of corpses (*piṇamalai*; PP, 28). But he suddenly recalls that he knows a special mantra—the *cañjivi mantiram*, or “mantra of regeneration”—that will allow him to revive all his dead warriors and turn the tide of battle. He must, however, find a place to carry out his lengthy preparatory prayers (*japam*) and tapas where the Pāṇḍavas cannot find him. So he goes to hide in a body of water: the Camprapañca River in the chapbook (PP, 29), a pond or tank (*taṭākam*) in performance. He steps in backwards to make it look to his pursuers as if he had exited rather than entered, and once inside the water he launches a long hymn to the goddess, calling her under her many names to revive his dead army (PP, 30–31) and, implicitly, to bless a new beginning to the war.

The Sanskrit epic has Duryodhana submerge himself in a lake to refresh himself,³⁰ but not to revive his army. The drama gets the latter theme from Villi, who refers to the mantra, uttered in a tank (*kuḷam*), as the *māmarai*, the “great secret” or “great Veda” (i.e., a great secret Vedic utterance; Villi 9.100–113). But Villi's model is clearly the classical epic-purāṇic myth of Śukra, the preceptor of the Asuras, whose possession of the *saṃjīvanī mantra* enables him to bring the demons back to life to continue their endless battles against the gods (Defourny 1978, 81–84, 91–94). According to Villi 9.101, it is Śukra's mantra that Duryodhana now possesses. It is instructive to see the drama fuse Villi's renovation of this archaic, ultimately Indo-European, revival theme with the regenerative powers of the goddess.

Duryodhana's mantra and prayers are so powerful that they make the birds and trees go still, bringing distress to the Pāṇḍavas, who search for him in vain amid the battlefield gore. Kṛṣṇa, however, knows where he has gone and why, and when the Pāṇḍavas appeal to him he tells Bhīma to use his mace to stir up the tank (or river) to interrupt Duryodhana. When Bhīma stirs the waters, at first nothing happens. But he appeals to the goddess Gangā, who is present in all waters, and the second time the waves touch the sky. Thus disturbed and unable to complete his mantra or carry out his plan, Duryodhana emerges from the water, fearful and distraught (PP, 30–37).

Here again we must mark the drama's innovations. In Villi 9.126, basically following the Sanskrit epic, it is hunters rather than Kṛṣṇa

30. It is called a lake (*hrada*); on the classical symbolism of this lake or “hole,” see Biardeau CR 89, 239–43.

who tell Bhīma where Duryodhana has hidden; the Pāṇḍavas (Bhīma in Villi, Dharma in the Sanskrit epic) disturb Duryodhana with harsh words rather than the mace,³¹ and they make no appeal to Gangā. This interruption of Duryodhana's efforts marks the third time we have seen Kṛṣṇa scheme to destroy someone's tapas in the water. Each time the tapas threatens the Pāṇḍavas, and in each case some sort of regeneration is prevented: of Pōrmannan's city, of Vṛddhākṣatra's *ancien régime*, and of Duryodhana's army. Moreover, the fathers of Pōrmannan and Jayadratha both worship Śiva, and Duryodhana hopes to achieve his results by calling upon Īśvarī, Śiva's wife. Each revival Kṛṣṇa terminates thus would have taken place under the sign of Śiva, the Destroyer.³² More than this, the churning of the waters inevitably evokes the epic-purāṇic myth of the churning of the ocean for the elixir of immortality (see Long 1976), an *avatāra* myth with cosmogonic overtones in which Viṣṇu plays the chief role. This myth in turn draws on the symbolism of the churning of firesticks to produce the sacrificial fire. Bhīma's mace is thus used in the fashion of the vertical or male firestick, and later it will be used to bring about the sacrificial death of Duryodhana.

Once Duryodhana has been flushed out from his place of hiding, fortune takes several swings before his final duel with Bhīma. Most notably, following Villi, the play transforms and amplifies the classical Sanskrit epic theme that Dharma shows a certain reluctance to rule.³³ Seeing Duryodhana's plight, either as he comes out of the water (in the play) or as he trudges toward the fighting ground (in Villi), Dharma offers him back his kingdom. In the play this is a powerful scene, underscoring Dharma's compassion and Duryodhana's grim and egotistical determination in refusing him. Willing to renounce the kingship and live peacefully under Duryodhana, Dharma takes off his own crown and fixes it to Duryodhana's. The Terukkūttu crowns have flat backs that are usually covered by

31. Bhīma threatens to release an arrow to disturb the tank as Rāma used his arrows to stir up the Palk Strait (Villi 9.137).

32. Cf. *Mbh.* 10.17, the myth told after the account of the night raid that ends the war, in which Śiva's abortive attempt to create the universe while doing tapas in the water results in his relinquishing his lingam. One recalls that after Pōrmannan kills his father, Śivalingam, he wears a Śivalingam on his head (see chap. 16, sec. B).

33. In *Mbh.* 9.31.22–25, Dharma offers Duryodhana the choice of opponents, and Kṛṣṇa, rebuking him for in effect giving the kingdom away, must coax Duryodhana into selecting Bhīma. Villi 9.139–45 has Duryodhana offer the choice to the Pāṇḍavas. The play (*PP*, 41–42) has Kṛṣṇa make the offer rather than Dharma.

a cloth that hangs from the tip to the shoulders. Now back-to-back on Duryodhana's head, the two crowns together form a single crown and an image of undivided sovereignty. But Duryodhana refuses the offer, suspecting it is a trick to keep him from conquering the crown outright (PP, 38–40; Villi 9.158–60). It seems here that the Tamil traditions have reversed the situation in the Sanskrit epic where Duryodhana, still recovering in the waters, offers his kingdom, the widowed earth, to Yūdhishṭhira, and Yūdhishṭhira refuses it, in part because a Kṣatriya does not accept gifts, but more pointedly because Duryodhana has now lost—like Dharma in the dice match—what he pretends to have the right to give (Mbh. 9.30.51–64; see Biardeau CR 89, 243, 246).

At last it is time for the culminating duel, a scene enacted for about two hours, taking one from the dead of night to daybreak. Duryodhana makes Kṛṣṇa promise not to interfere, and then the two combatants take up their maces. They joust for a considerable time, often in a graceful and well-choreographed pas de deux with maces aloft. Duryodhana also “hides” for a while in the audience. But neither gains the advantage. Finally Kṛṣṇa asks them to stop: the battle should not continue past night; better they should both declare their points of vulnerability (*uyir nilai*, literally “life spot” or “soul spot”; PP, 44). This theme seems to be “new” in the *Villipāratam*, where it is Duryodhana's idea to pose the question (9.173). Bhīma, speaking truthfully, points to his forehead and says his vulnerable spot is on his head (*cirattil*). But Duryodhana, lying, tells Bhīma his is on his forehead (*nerriyil*) and makes the same gesture (PP, 44–45; cf. Villi 9.174–75).

When the fight resumes, Duryodhana withstands Bhīma's strongest blow to the head. But Bhīma succumbs to Duryodhana's blow and falls, bleeding from the head, thrown back against the musicians' bench. Seeing this Arjuna trembles (PP, 46) and appeals to Kṛṣṇa, who must reassure him. Kṛṣṇa knows Duryodhana has lied, and further that he is destined to have a short life. But it is necessary to resort to a trick. Arjuna, he says, should go before Bhīma and beat his right thigh (*valatu tuṭai*) as if he is praising Duryodhana. Thereby he will show Bhīma Duryodhana's true weak spot. The chapbook version follows Villi (9.182–83) and the Sanskrit epic (9.57.18) in having Arjuna convey the sign of the thigh, thus keeping Kṛṣṇa from directly interfering. But in actual performance, I have always seen Kṛṣṇa slyly make a gentle slap to the right thigh himself. In any case, it is neither the Sanskrit epic nor Villi, but the ritual cycle, that prompts here one of the drama's

most telling innovations. For in the classical sources, where it is a question of one thigh or the other, Bhīma's target is the left thigh.³⁴

When Bhīma sees this sign of the thigh, he immediately understands, rallies himself, and resumes the battle dance with his cousin. At this point (at Tindivanam in 1977), Kṛṣṇa at last intercedes and directs the two combatants toward the nearby Draupadī temple to perform a pūjā to the goddess (plate 29). In their absence, the music and songs continue on the stage. When the actors return, their fight breaks out again right in the midst of the audience, and it is there among the startled onlookers that Bhīma at last delivers the final blow. Not surprisingly, this scene is often performed differently; only at Tindivanam did the killing take place offstage. But my two main informants insist that the pūjā to the goddess is a regular occurrence. Before they enact the killing scene, the two actors are thus able to express their devotion to Draupadī, much as the Duḥśāsana actor does before her disrobing. As characters rather than actors, the two opponents, when all is said and done, enter the temple as one, offering themselves to the goddess together before splitting their final and still undetermined roles as victim and sacrificer, demon and devotee.

Once he has fallen, Duryodhana knows that he has been foiled by Kṛṣṇa and abuses him, calling him a low herdsman boy (*inamullayitaiṭ payalē*), a cunning thief, and so on. Bhīma, unable to bear these insults, kicks Duryodhana's head (*PP*, 47–48). Biardeau argues that this gesture, done in the Sanskrit epic with his left foot before Dharma interrupts him, involves an intended "crushing" (root *mṛd*), left incomplete, of the head of the Pāṇḍavas' "second Soma victim" (Biardeau *CR* 91, 166–67; *Mbh.* 9.58.12, 15). In this light, the play is less interesting than Villi, who has Bhīma "crush," "bore," or even "pound as with a mortar" (*kuttiṇāṇ*) Duryodhana's chest (*mārpiṇ-micai*; 9.186). In any case, from this point on, there are considerable variations from the text of the drama to its actual performances. The chapbook version continues with several scenes,

34. Villi 9.183 does not say which thigh it is; when Bhīma cleaves Duryodhana's "strong thigh" (*vanṛotai* = *val-toṭai*), it is possible that *val* ("strong") could be taken as *valatu* ("right"), a suggestion of R. Murthy. In the Sanskrit epic, the Critical Edition has Arjuna simply strike his thigh "with his hand" (*hastenorū atādayat*; 9.57.18). Northern recension texts have *savyamūrum atādayat*, "he struck his left thigh," recalling that when Duryodhana bared his left thigh (*savyamūrum*; 2.63.12) to Draupadī, insolently inviting her to sit on it just after her molestation, Bhīma vowed to break it. In taking Arjuna's cue, Bhīma aims at both thighs, but seems to hit only one, the text sometimes being unclear by the use of compounds (9.57.44–46; cf. 9.63.1 and 9.63.15). For an initial discussion of the Draupadī cult thigh-cutting rituals, see Hildebeitel 1982b, 91–95.

some drawn from classical sources and others apparently inspired by folk and ritual traditions, which were either omitted in the performances I observed, or summarized as background action by the Kaṭṭiyaṅkāraṇ. In order to concentrate on the performances that were observed in full festival settings, I thus present the remainder of the chapbook play in outline only. I note the likely provenance of each episode, and whether it was actually performed, in parentheses.

1. Balarāma arrives, blames Kṛṣṇa for the abuse of Duryodhana, and sets off to do tapas, resolving never again to look on Kṛṣṇa's face (*PP*, 47–51; not performed; in classical sources Balarāma arrives before the duel, and tells at length of the pilgrimage he has completed already, during the course of the war).

2. Draupadī comes to the battlefield, sees the dead, is pleased, and praises her brother Kṛṣṇa for his actions on her behalf. She asks to see Duryodhana, but Kṛṣṇa first shows her Duḥśāsana, Droṇa, and Bhīṣma, and only then Duryodhana, who lies dying. It being sunset, Kṛṣṇa sends her to spend the night in "the city of Virāṭa" (*PP*, 51–56; folk sources; performance optional).

3. Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇḍavas absent themselves from their army camp for the night (*PP*, 56–58; classical sources; performed).

4. Reborn as a fox (or jackal), Śakuni returns to haunt Duryodhana till dispelled by Aśvatthāman (*PP*, 58–60; folk sources; performed).

5. Having vowed to Duryodhana that he will kill the Pāṇḍavas, Aśvatthāman, possessed by Śiva, raids their army camp at night. He kills the five sons of Draupadī by mistake, and also her brother Dhṛṣṭadyumna, the slayer of Aśvatthāman's father, Droṇa (*PP*, 61–71; classical sources; performance optional).

6. Aśvatthāman shows Duryodhana the heads of Draupadī's sons; Duryodhana softens, curses Aśvatthāman, and then dies praised by millions of heavenly beings (*PP*, 71–74; classical sources; performance optional).

7. Draupadī comes to the battlefield, puts up her hair, and lets it down again, demanding revenge against Aśvatthāman (*PP*, 76–81; largely classical sources; performance optional).

8. At Kṛṣṇa's bidding, Arjuna neutralizes Aśvatthāman (*PP*, 81–85; classical sources; performance optional).

9. Gāndhārī and the Kaurava wives come to mourn the dead (*PP*, 86–87; classical sources with folk innovations; not

performed within the drama but in modified form later in a ritual setting).

10. Draupadī completes the binding of her hair (*PP*, 87–88; folk sources; performed).

The indications as to whether an episode is performed or not reflect only the observed festival stagings of two troupes. I am sure that greater variation could be found. In any case, of the ten episodes, it is only scenes 2 through 8 and 10 that were enacted. The Pakkiri-pālaiyam troupe performed all eight of these scenes at Tindivanam in 1977, whereas the Ciṇṇakkaram troupe performed only scenes 4 and 10 at Mēlaccēri in 1982, omitting everything that concerns Aśvatthāman even though the rituals performed later that same morning at Mēlaccēri presupposed Aśvatthāman's killings. The designation "optional" thus does not mean "indifferent." If we take all the observed performance material together, it breaks down into three sequences: one centered on Śakuni (scene 4), one on Aśvatthāman (3 and 5–8), and one on Draupadī (2, 7, and 10).³⁵ All three are important and are best treated as a coherent performed whole, from which variations are only to be expected.

Following the general order of performance, when Bhīma kicks Duryodhana's head, Kṛṣṇa (not Balarāma) scolds him. Then Kṛṣṇa calls upon a host of Bhūtas (ghosts, ghastly demons) to guard the Pāṇḍavas' army camp (*pācaṇai*) for the night. He himself sets off with the Pāṇḍavas to spend the night at a forest flower garden (*pūṅkāvaṇam*) that is attended by sages, leaving Dhṛṣṭadyumna and the "young Pañcapāṇḍavas" (*iḷampañcapāṇṭavarkaḷ*), sons of Draupadī, behind in the camp (*PP*, 56–58). The "folk" detail about the flower garden nicely accentuates Kṛṣṇa's concern that the Pāṇḍavas be found in auspicious surroundings during this night of slaughter.

Duryodhana, meanwhile, reclines against the musician's platform, left alone to rue his fate. At this point in classical versions, he is surrounded by predators whom he seeks to shoo away. The drama, however, introduces the notion that Śakuni is among them, having been reborn as a jackal or fox (*nari*).³⁶ The Śakuni actor thus

35. Where 2 was performed at Tindivanam, it occurred as part of 7. Kṛṣṇa's showing of the three warriors before Duryodhana is also similar to the prelude to the ritual enactment of the hair-tying at the Singapore Draupadī temple (see Babb 1974, 18–19).

36. The word *nari* has both meanings. Though I was told the fox was meant, which is appropriate to Śakuni's lifelong craftiness, the animal's role in this scene surely also evokes the jackal. This role is anticipated by Śakuni's Sanskrit name, which connects him with inauspicious carrion-eating birds (see Biardeau CR 89, 222–23, 236).

reappears stripped of all his royal paraphernalia, surrounded by packs of dogs, Bhūtas, and Paiśācas (at Tindivanam played by snarling children, prowling on all fours, reined in from the local audience and identified as Śakuni's former brothers). When Śakuni sees the wounded Duryodhana he determines to devour his body. Duryodhana protests this defilement: "Don't eat me, don't touch me" (PP, 59). But Śakuni, leaping about with bulging eyes, won't be deterred. He decries Duryodhana's cruelties to the Pāṇḍavas and says a just fate has come upon him. Piece by piece he divests Duryodhana of his armor—epaulettes, chest plate, and all—holding each morsel to his teeth to "devour" it and then discarding it to litter the stage. Then, from beneath Duryodhana's upper garment, he slowly draws out a long yellow saree cloth—Duryodhana's intestines—and chomps gleefully on each span as it passes through his hands before adding it to the colorful but dismal clutter of Duryodhana's remains (plate 30). Finally, Aśvatthāman arrives to drive him away.

Let us note that this scene brings together two choreographic themes that we have met only separately before: the slow removal of armor (in the deaths of Aravāṇ and Abhimanyu) and the littering of the stage with colored garments (in Kṛṣṇa's water sports and Draupadī's disrobing). For Duryodhana's intestines to recall Draupadī's sarees is a bold but fitting stroke in the play of images.

Aśvatthāman is grieved to see Duryodhana in this plight, and he asks to be made the "leader" (*talaivāṇ*) of the Kaurava army. Duryodhana wants to see the heads of the Pāṇḍavas before he dies, and when Aśvatthāman promises to fulfill this wish, Duryodhana agrees to install him as his last marshal (*cēnātipati*). He gives him a tiara (*paṭṭam*, or *mukutaṃ* in performance; cf. Villi 9.203: his own "crest-jewel," or *cikāmaṇi*) and then tells him not to return without the Pāṇḍavas' heads (PP, 62–63). Note that while Villi also has Aśvatthāman vow to behead "Bhīma and the rest" (9.203; see Shulman 1985, 141), at this point in the Sanskrit epic Duryodhana anoints Aśvatthāman only on the latter's vow to "kill all the Pāṇcālas" (Mbh. 9.64.35). Until now Aśvatthāman has never fought at full fury. His containment has several "new" explanations,³⁷ but all are essentially narrative strategies to reveal how it is that his

37. Best known in Tamil tradition is a scene in "Kṛṣṇa the Ambassador" (KT, 60–61) that can be traced through Villi (5.4.224–29) to Peruntēvaṇār (Venketesā Acharya 1981, 114–15): Kṛṣṇa makes Aśvatthāman appear to Duryodhana as though he is swearing to help the Pāṇḍavas; thus Duryodhana never trusts him. In "Eighteenth-Day War," Duryodhana scolds him for not fighting seriously since Karna was appointed marshal (PP, 61–62).

full destructive potential as a protégé of Śiva—the god who receives the final “remainder share” of the sacrifice of battle—is not unleashed until the war’s end (see Hildebeitel 1976a, 312–35; cf. Scheuer 1982, 302–39; and especially Venketesā Acharya 1981, 116).

Supposedly it is nightfall, though the scene is actually performed at daybreak. Aśvatthāman goes to the army camp. Unable to defeat the Bhūta guardians left there by Kṛṣṇa, he prays to Śiva, who comes, bestows his grace (*arul*), and grants him the boon that so long as he fights before dawn, he will be able to kill anyone he faces (*PP*, 67–68; cf. Villi 10.3–7). According to my two main dramatist informants, he is in a state of possession. He kills the guardian Bhūtas, then the remnants of the army (man and beast), Dhṛṣṭadyumna—Draupadī’s “only” brother, according to the same informants (cf. chap. 17, n. 15)—and the “Young Pāṇcapāṇḍavas” (*PP*, 68–71). According to the chapbook, Dhṛṣṭadyumna puts up some resistance before being beheaded, but his part was unacted in performance, further evidence of his eclipse in the Terukkūttu. It is rather the killing of the “Young Pāṇcapāṇḍavas” that is most central.

In the Sanskrit epic and Villi, the five sons of Draupadī wake to find the frenzied Aśvatthāman before them. In the former, they rise to fight him, and Aśvatthāman kills them by a series of symbolically precise mutilations: beheading the sons of Arjuna and Nakula, disfiguring the mouth of Sahadeva’s son, lopping off the arm of the son of Bhīma, and striking Yudhiṣṭhira’s son in the abdomen (*Mbh.* 10.8.50–58; see Hildebeitel 1976a, 324–36). Moreover, once he is finished, Aśvatthāman clearly knows he has killed the Pāṇḍavas’ children rather than the Pāṇḍavas themselves. Leaving their remains like those of all the others in his wake, that is what he lucidly and unrepentently tells his two Kaurava co-survivors Kṛpa and Kṛtavarma (10.8.150), and what he then reports to the dying Duryodhana (10.9.49).

Villi, however, gives us a much transformed version of this scene: one that he may well derive from a lost portion of Peruntēvaṇār’s ninth-century Tamil *Pāratam*. For as I observed in chapter 2, there are a number of passages in surviving portions of this Pallava-period text that seem to be prototypes, not only for Villi, but for the tenth-century Kannada *Bhāratam* of Pampa. Our present scene, however, is the most important instance where Villi and Pampa are so close as to make it very likely that a lost portion of Peruntēvaṇār is their common literary source. Both Villi and Pampa have the frenzied Aśvatthāman behead the Pāṇḍava children without

recognizing them, thinking he has killed their fathers (Sitaramiah 1967, 141). In Villi, he beheads all five before they can reach their weapons (10.13). Our play, of course, knows Villi's version, adding that Aśvatthāman beheads the "Young Pañcapāṇḍavas" while they are sleeping, and supposedly—reinforcing his failure to recognize them—at twilight, and without even lifting their bedsheets. To represent this, five wadded balls of cloth are placed on the ground, all white except for a larger green and red one that represents the son of Bhīma. The crazed Aśvatthāman then steals up on them with his sword, and "beheads" them.

Most important, however, rather than leave these severed heads behind, Aśvatthāman takes up all five wads and rushes with them to Duryodhana (plate 31). Here again, Villi provides the play's precedent: "Holding the five heads of those splendid young men—to the horror of the gods—he reached the Kuru king" (10.17, as translated in Shulman 1985, 144). Anticipating the joy of revenge, Duryodhana welcomes Aśvatthāman and asks him to hold up the heads one by one (*PP*, 72): a gesture we shall soon recall. But Duryodhana retains a keen eye, and he sees that the heads are those of his nephews. As Villi has him say so poignantly, "the faces of these children are very like the bright faces of their loving fathers" (10.20; trans. Shulman 1985, 145; cf. *PP*, 72). Or in Pampa's touching words, the suddenly grief-stricken Duryodhana cries out, "Like one who plucks little lotus buds from the lake, you have brought to me, O Aśvatthāma, the heads of the five Pāṇḍava children. However can you be redeemed from the sin of slaying children" (as translated in Sitaramiah 1967, 141–42). It is at this point that Villi and Pampa, and one suspects Peruntēvaṇār before them, modify the image of Duryodhana, who has no sorrow for his nephews in the Sanskrit epic. The dying king now regrets Aśvatthāman's mistake and rebukes him. Before dismissing him with the command to atone for his sin by performing tapas in the forest (Villi) or Himalayas (Pampa), Duryodhana laments the destruction of all his relatives (*kiḷaiṇar*; Villi 10.25), realizing that the death of his nephews has broken off the last "sprout of the Kuru family" (*kurukulattiṇ koḷuntinai*), a family that at long last he now acknowledges as, not two kulas, but one (Villi 10.23; see Shulman 1985, 146).

The drama retains Duryodhana's self-reproach over the destruction of his kula, and sharpens his harsh words to Aśvatthāman. And Aśvatthāman's mind trembles, seeing himself as a slayer of children who has brought reproach on himself until the end of the

world (*PP*, 72–73).³⁸ He goes off to do penance, and Duryodhana dies, blessed by the heavenly host (*PP*, 75; cf. *Mbh.* 9.60.47–55; Hildebeitel 1976a, 289). He is at last a demon-king of some redeeming compassion. But we cannot yet call him a devotee. He is still, through Aśvatthāman, the destroyer of his kulam, and Draupadī the Kulateyvam will now have the most searingly personal reasons—additional to those she has had since “Dice Match and Dis-robing”—to complete her revenge against him.

The awaited moment has thus arrived, but not as expected, or at least as wished for by Draupadī. Her victory over Duryodhana is disfigured by the deepest suffering. At first, when she sees the body of Duryodhana, she starts to put up her hair. But when she sees the heads of her sons and brother, she unties it once again, spreads it out down her back, and breaks into lamentation. Let us note that in ritual enactments of the death of Duryodhana, there are sometimes accompanying rites for the revival of the “Young Pañcapāṇḍavas.” I leave their mythology for volume 2, however, as it is tied wholly to the rituals and has no place in the dramas or in the classical Tamil versions of the epic. What concerns us now is that amid her bitter lament, Draupadī announces that she won’t tie up her hair again until she knows who killed her sons and brother (*PP*, 76–79) and receives his head in recompense (performed version). Indeed, according to the pāratyār Venkatesa Bhagavatar, Draupadī’s vow is as follows: “When I find out the man who has cut my five sons, I must take his head and stamp on it with my foot. Only then will I tie up my hair.” Draupadī also makes this vow (*capatam*) to trample Aśvatthāman’s head in the prose version of the Nallāppillai *Pāratam* (Caṇmukakkavirāyar 1969, vol. 3, *Cavittika Parvam*, p. 83).

We must recall at this point that Aśvatthāman is a Brahman, and that Draupadī is thus demanding a Brahman’s head. Indeed, her vow to step upon the head is reminiscent of the Aṅkāḷamman cult’s Brahmanicide myth from Mēl Malaiyaṇūr: when Brahmā’s fifth head, which Śiva has severed, finally leaves Śiva’s hand at the Mēl Malaiyaṇūr cremation ground to devour the food that Aṅkāḷamman has left there, Aṅkāḷamman “tramples the head,” promises it the food of a hundred thousand fish a day to avert its destructive hunger, and curses Brahmā to have no temples “anywhere in this and the two times seven worlds” (Meyer 1984, 37, 160–66; cf. chap. 16, sec. B, above). One senses in Draupadī’s gesture another parallel regional evocation, slightly muted but still unmistakable, of

38. According to the pāratyār Venkatesha Bhagavatar, Duryodhana curses Aśvatthāman to become a leper.

the mythology of the “head of Brahmā,” the weapon of world-destruction. In this connection, let us recall her distinction among her sister goddesses—made possible by the services of Pōrmaṇṇaṇ or Pōttu Rāja—of not holding a skull in her hand.³⁹ Now we will see how close she comes to this other “sisterly” gesture of trampling a severed head with her foot.

Draupadī’s call for the head of Aśvatthāman ties in with a complex of reinforcing evocations of this theme, built up from its first development in the Sanskrit epic’s treatment of the night raid with its preludes and sequel, transformed in Villi, and further reworked by Draupadī cult mythologists in the sacrificial idioms associated above all with Pōttu Rāja and Pōrmaṇṇaṇ. In the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, Aśvatthāman possesses the “head of Brahmā” (Brahmaśiras) as his most destructive weapon, and in the sequel to Draupadī’s demands for revenge, when Aśvatthāman holds the Brahmaśiras in readiness to destroy the world, only Arjuna can neutralize it with the identical weapon of his own (*Mbh.* 10.13–14). Villi dispenses with this contest of the weapons as part of his auspicious rendering of the war’s end. Instead of having Aśvatthāman hold the “head of Brahmā” as a doomsday weapon, he evokes the same theme when he deepens Aśvatthāman’s connections with Śiva, referring to him as Śiva’s son (10.16) just before he kills Draupadī’s sons and rushes with their heads to show them to Duryodhana. In Shulman’s words, Aśvatthāman’s identity with his “father” Śiva “is even more powerfully affirmed by the striking adaptation of a mythic image: Aśvatthāman holds in his hands the Upapāṇḍavas’ severed heads, just as the Brahmanicide-Śiva is left holding Brahmā’s skull” (1985, 144). Let us recall that it is Villi who gives us our oldest known Tamil account in which Aśvatthāman beheads the five sons of Draupadī. This makes his allusion to Śiva’s Brahmanicide—and we shall see in a moment that it is not his only one—all the more powerful. For it now becomes a question of five heads, like the original five heads of Brahmā.

The Draupadī cult’s treatment of this episode involves further elaborations from within this complex. We see that the Brahmaśiras is evoked by Aśvatthāman’s link with Śiva and his holding of the five heads, and furthermore, by his affinities with Brahmā. Here, however, the train of associations takes us not only into multiforms linking the head of Brahmā with the goddess, but deep into the epic. As already remarked, the Draupadī cult mythology goes beyond Villi in having Draupadī demand this “Brahman’s head.” In

39. See chap. 17, sec. A, above; also Vidyarthi 1976, 59: Kālī severs and then holds the head of the demon Darikan in a Kerala Mudiattu folk drama.

Villi, she makes no vengeful demands at all. In the Sanskrit epic, she first demands Aśvatthāman's life, but as proof of his fall she wants only to see the jewel that he was born with on his head. When the Pāṇḍavas bring her the jewel without having slain him, she accepts it as a sufficient sign of his humiliation and agrees his life should be spared (*Mbh.* 10.11.14–15; 10.16.33). Clearly in this case the Draupadī cult's versions derive ultimately from the Sanskrit epic—perhaps transformed through Nallāppillai⁴⁰—rather than from Villi. This means, however, that Draupadī now demands not only the head of a Brahman, but a Brahman who is the “fifth head,” or leader, of the Kaurava army. Indeed, let us note that when Aśvatthāman asks Duryodhana to make him the fifth marshal, he asks to be made his *talaivaṇ*, “headman” (*PP*, 62), the same term used in Pōrmaṇṇaṇ's designation as *patai-talaivaṇ* in “Pōrmaṇṇaṇ's Fight.” It is only Duryodhana who restates the request, making Aśvatthāman his “marshal” (*ceṇātipati*; *PP*, 63). Furthermore, as we saw in chapter 9, Aśvatthāman's head has an apocalyptic form that can be linked with the Brahmasīras itself: rather than being born with a jewel on his head, he is born with the head of a horse. Indeed, it was in that context that we learned how the Terukkūttu has enriched Villi's notion that Aśvatthāman is Śiva's son. In the Pakkiriṭālayam troupe's performance, Duryodhana recalls this trait, referring to Aśvatthāman as “horse-headed” (*parimukha*) at the time of naming him his “horse-headed marshal.”

The Brahmasīrascheda—the myth of Śiva's severing of the head of Brahṁā—thus provides the thread by which the Draupadī cult's mythology strings together Draupadī's call for the head of Aśvatthāman and Aśvatthāman's holding of the five heads of Draupadī's sons. But it must also be traced through some other severed heads before we can tie it up, in the inevitable iconic metaphor, as the goddess's necklace of skulls. Indeed, let us pause to recall that Draupadī possesses such a garland of heads: the nine hundred and ninety-nine heads—with one left for Pōttu Rāja—that she sings of stringing in the improvised Terukkūttu performance of the killing of Acalammācuraṇ. The metaphoric necklace she strings at Kurukṣetra is thus strung “for real” at Gingee. Nor is “Flower Stringer,” her name in disguise in early nineteenth-century Dindigul, a far cry from these ominous implications.

To trace this thread through the Draupadī cult's version of Kurukṣetra, we must first go back deep into the epic itself: to a war episode that both Draupadī cult drama and Piracāṅkam brush over.

40. I have not had access to the Nallāppillai *Pāratam* past the fifth book (*Uttiyōkaparuvam*).

This scene—despite its submergence, already noted at the beginning of this chapter—is the unforgotten epic lodestone of all the other cranial transformations we have come across. The episode that reverberates through these myths is the death of Droṇa.

In the Sanskrit epic, it is Droṇa who first teaches the technique of the Brahmaśiras weapon to both Arjuna (*Mbh.* 1.123.74–77) and Aśvatthāman (10.12.4–9). Droṇa warns both of his protégés, as does Śiva when he gives the Brahmaśiras again to Arjuna under the name Pāśupata (3.41.7–8; see chap. 12), that it must never be used against human beings lest it destroy the world. He knows Aśvatthāman cannot be trusted. Yet it is Droṇa's own transgression, his use of the weapon as a Brahman to kill—in fact, behead (7.164.80, 84)—numerous Kṣatriya Pāṇcālas, whose ignorance of the Brahmaśiras prevents them from retaliating, that brings Agni and a host of Brahman Ṛṣis (headed by the Seven Ṛṣis of the Big Dipper) to rebuke him for fighting unrighteously (7.164.87–92). Droṇa continues to fight for some time, still drawing upon the Brahmā weapon (*brāhmastra*; *brāhmamastra*), against his determined adversary Dhr̥ṣṭadyumna.⁴¹ His opponent also knows the Brahmā weapon and uses it against him (7.164.129), presumably having learned it from Droṇa himself, who, despite knowing it would result in his own death, had been Dhr̥ṣṭadyumna's guru (see 1.155.51–52). But it is the rebuke from the Ṛṣis—along with Yudhiṣṭhira's famous lie that Aśvatthāman has been slain (Bhīma had killed an elephant by that name, and Dharma, prodded by Kṛṣṇa, delivers the lie to dispirit Droṇa further)—that leads Droṇa to lay down his weapons, enter into a tranquil yogic state, and ascend to Brahmāloka (7.165.38–45).

It is at this point that Dhr̥ṣṭadyumna—born from the same fire sacrifice as Draupadī for Droṇa's destruction—assaults the lifeless and speechless body, grasps Droṇa's head by the hair with his left hand, severs it with his sword (7.165.47, 120), leaps down from the chariot looking fierce like the red-limbed sun, and hurls Droṇa's "great head" (*śiro mahat*) "into the van" or "face" (*pramukhe*) of the Kaurava army. It is, of course, the army that Droṇa has marshaled, or "headed," for *five days* (see 7.164.19; 7.165.98), and it is now headless without him. Seeing his severed head flying toward the position from which he himself has just led them, the Kaurava forces flee in all directions (7.165.53–55).

It is hard not to think that Droṇa's "great head"—further described with reference to his eighty-five years as "dark" (*śyāma*)

41. The Brahmāstra seems to be another name of the Brahmaśiras (see Biardeau 1978, 122; also *Mbh.* 7.164.129, 7.165.16 and nn., 22, 101) or at least a weapon from the same symbolic stock.

and covered with white locks hanging down to his ears (7.165.49, 103)—is already in the Sanskrit epic a portentuous image of the Brahmaśiras, the weapon in whose use others have been instructed by Droṇa himself, and whose misuse by Droṇa foreshadows its misuse by his son Aśvatthāman in the contest of the weapons. The fact that the Sanskrit epic never tells the Brahmaśirascheda myth is no guarantee that its poets did not know it. It is indeed hard to explain their frequent references to the Brahmaśiras as a weapon without assuming a knowledge of the myth. But if the Sanskrit epic leaves us uncertain on this point, Villi does not. Yet Villi is still consistent in his reworkings. Just as there is no contest of weapons between Arjuna and Aśvatthāman at the end of the war, so here there is no use of the Brahmaśiras or Brāhmāstra in the duel between Droṇa and Dhr̥ṣṭadyumna. The Ṛṣis rebuke Droṇa without any such provocation (Villi 7.5.13–14). But Villi retains the image of the Brahmaśiras in the verse that describes the beheading scene itself, making explicit the very connection that the Sanskrit epic dangles so tantalizingly before us:

Like Giriśa, the bearer of the Pināka bow [i.e., Śiva] of old, taking and plucking off [*killiyetutta*] the middle head of Brahmā, who resides in the lotus, the arrow [*ampu*] of the hero Dhr̥ṣṭadyumna, whose horses were rearing up, right then severed [*taḷḷiya*] that ascetic sage's head, alas. (7.5.29)

As the commentator puts it, the simile (*uvamai*) for the beheading of Droṇa is Śiva's plucking of the middle head "among the five heads" (*aintutalaikaḷu*) of Brahmā (Kōpālakiruṣṇamācāriyar 1976, 7: p. 410). What is as striking as the image, however, is the fact that even while Villi draws out the comparison, he deprives the scene of its most telling analogy. His Dhr̥ṣṭadyumna does not hold Droṇa's severed head with his left hand. Rather, he shoots it off with an arrow. Thus as far as Droṇa's head itself goes, the evocation of the Brahmaśiras is deepened. But as far as Dhr̥ṣṭadyumna's part is concerned, his once decisive gesture is rendered commonplace. It would therefore seem that Villi has also made a contribution to the "eclipse" of Dhr̥ṣṭadyumna.

We shall return to this submerged episode in our final chapter. But here we must turn to the last of the heads severed for Draupadī's Kurukṣetra necklace. Once again it is the unthreaded head, the head that Draupadī cult mythology holds so openly before us. We return, of course, to the head, or heads, held by Pōrmanṇan-Pōttu Rāja. For the Draupadī cult's transformations of Aśvatthāman's geste, and its submergence of Dhr̥ṣṭadyumna's, are unin-

telligible without it. When Aśvatthāman holds out the five heads before Duryodhana, in the Draupadī cult he is certainly as much an inverted image of Draupadī's head-holding guardian as he is of the Brahmanicide Śiva, who possesses him. Moreover, as we have noted frequently, most recently in chapter 17, it is primarily Pōrmannan-Pōttu Rāja who has eclipsed Dhr̥ṣṭadyumna in Draupadī cult mythology. We now see the significance of Pōrmannan's effective replacement of Dhr̥ṣṭadyumna as the leader of the Pāṇḍava army: he eclipses Dhr̥ṣṭadyumna as the marshal who holds the murderous head. We have further seen that when Pōrmannan holds a head, he is a multiform of Pōttu Rāja, and that the head in either's hand is in at least one aspect a multiform of the Brahmasīras, specifically, of the Brahmarākṣasic dimensions of the head of Brahmā. In Pōttu Rāja's case, the head is identified still more precisely as that of a Brahmarākṣasa descendant of Baka. Finally, the heads that Aśvatthāman and Pōttu Rāja carry are apocalyptic. Just as Aśvatthāman normally—pace Villi—holds the head of Brahmā as the doomsday weapon, so the head in Pōttu Rāja's hand will destroy the world if it touches the ground.

It is here that the Draupadī cult's treatment of Aśvatthāman's geste at last becomes clear. The two head-holdings mirror each other and split the fundamental theme; both involve transformations of the symbolism that Pōrmannan-Pōttu Rāja takes over from Dhr̥ṣṭadyumna. On (or in) the one hand, Aśvatthāman holds the five heads of Draupadī's children. On the other, Draupadī wants the Pāṇḍavas to return to her holding Aśvatthāman's head. In one aspect, Aśvatthāman thus appears as Pōttu Rāja's inverted image, or opposite number: the goddess's nemesis rather than her aide-de-camp. In the other, his head is sought as a multiform of the head Pōttu Rāja holds. These inversions also hold echoes of the Brahmarākṣasic mythology we have variously detected in both Pōttu Rāja and the Brahmasīras. Let us recall from chapter 13 that the heads of the Pāṇḍava children that the Brahman Aśvatthāman holds have become, in Draupadī cult mythology, those of five Rākṣasas. Indeed, the head he holds up singly before Duryodhana is the most rākṣasic of all: it is the head of the son of Bhīma (see chap. 8), the largest of the five heads and the only one not composed of white cloth but of red and green (see plate 31). Aśvatthāman himself, like his father, Droṇa fulfills one of the precise and decisive Brahmarākṣasa criteria (see Biardeau CR 88, 181; above, chap. 8). Both father and son are destructive and potentially world-devouring Brahmans, non-dharmic wielders of the head of Brahmā, who usurp and misuse power—the "headship" of the Kaurava forces—when the Kṣatriyas are in default.

Yet Draupadī's demand for Aśvatthāman's head has still one more twist. Like her sister goddess Aṅkālamman, who tramples the head of Brahmā, Draupadī is not content to have the head merely held. She wants to trample it with her foot. For the moment, let us just note the different orientations of these two village goddess mythologies. Both Aśvatthāman—head and all—and Aṅkālamman's head of Brahmā are removed from the world of ritual activity: like Brahmā who will have no temples until the end of time, Aśvatthāman must wander in exile, absolving his sin through tapas. But the two myths differ most significantly in the implications of the goddess's treatment of the head. When Aṅkālamman tramples the fifth head of Brahmā, it retains its rākṣasic devouring power in a new mythical situation, involving its daily diet of fish. For Draupadī to demand, or vow to trample, the head of Aśvatthāman—a Brahman who has held the heads of her sons, who at least traditionally wields the head of Brahmā as his most lethal weapon, and who has just carried out his most destructive role as the fifth head of Duryodhana's army in revenge for the beheading that transforms his father's head into a negative image of the Brahmasīras—would seem to imply the final nullification of the destructive capacity of the Brahmasīras in its ultimate epic form. Yet the "head of Brahmā" as doomsday weapon cannot be destroyed until the death of Brahmā and the end of the universe. Indeed, that is what seems to be evoked when Aṅkālamman tramples the skull of Brahmā in the crematorium prior to reuniting herself with the left side of Śiva. Within the mythic frame of the *Mahābhārata*, such a pralayaic reunion cannot occur, and further intervention is thus not long in coming.

Having heard Draupadī demand Aśvatthāman's head, Dharma rebukes her, saying her one vow has caused slaughter enough. He even calls her a sinner (*pātaki*), and threatens to commit suicide if he must listen to more such demands (*PP*, 79). But Kṛṣṇa of course intercedes. He explains that Aśvatthāman, aided by Śiva, is responsible for the killings, and that had he himself not absented the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī from the camp, all would now be dead. Aśvatthāman cannot be killed, as he is protected by a special boon from Śiva. Yet despite these assertions, we once again realize that Kṛṣṇa has connived in the deaths of the sons of another of his "sisters." The chapbook version at this point rather forgets Draupadī, and trails off into a curious account based ultimately on the Sanskrit epic's story of the contest of the weapons. Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna to capture Aśvatthāman, tie him to his chariot wheel, and bring him before the Pāṇḍavas. And then he provokes the fight

between them that leads Aśvatthāman to destroy the embryo in the womb of Uttarā, wife of Abhimanyu (PP, 81–85). The performed version, however, does not forget Draupadī, though it omits the contest of the weapons (like Villi) and includes nothing about Uttarā. Here Kṛṣṇa urges Arjuna to take his bow and arrow and shoot off the tiara (*maḥiṣam*) that Aśvatthāman obtained when Duryodhana made him marshal. Arjuna thus guides the arrow so that it removes the tiara and drops it at Draupadī's feet. She is at first unconsolated, and she reminds Kṛṣṇa that she wanted a head. But Kṛṣṇa tells her tiara and head are equal and urges her to accept the former as a sign of Aśvatthāman's submission, his "head" having bowed to her feet. Here we see the drama's final transformation of the head of Brahmā. It is replaced by the tiara off the "fifth head" of the Kaurava army, providing a substitute for the "Brahman's head" that finally satisfies the goddess without her trampling it.

The chapbook version of the play continues to introduce further "unperformed" material. That is, I have not seen it performed, though it is not without interest. We have already noted the incorporation of the combat between Arjuna and Aśvatthāman that leads the latter to deflect his unwithdrawable weapon into the womb of Uttarā. This episode is of great importance in the Sanskrit epic, for it results in Kṛṣṇa's revival of the stillborn child, Parikṣit, thus regenerating the Lunar dynasty (see Hildebeitel 1976a, 336–53). Though the story is well known to my chief dramatist informants, it has no part in their dramas, and Villi barely alludes to it, making Aśvatthāman's possession of the embryo-destroying weapon only a pretext for convincing the Pāṇḍavas to stay away from him (10.43). Whatever its literary sources, however, the chapbook account does show likely cultic influences. When Uttarā bleeds, her servant maids store all the blood in a large salver (*tāmpāṣam*) and bring it to Kṛṣṇa who blesses the blood, gives it form, and turns it into the child Parikṣit (PP, 85). Most likely this scene has had its festival performances, and has transformed the traditional story in accord with the familiar theme of fertile blood in the mythology of the goddess (see chap. 13, sec. A).

The final scene, the binding of the hair, also provides the chapbook author an occasion for certain additional "unperformed" digressions whose source seems to be more ritual than literary. His "general voice" announces that Kṛṣṇa has urged Dharma to let his mind or heart (*neṅcam*) become a great fire to cremate the dead. Draupadī will thus be able to put up her hair while the Kaurava widows weep (PP, 87). Although one need not equate this cre-

mation fire with the forthcoming ceremonies of the firewalking pit, they are surely evoked, as is Dharma's link with his father, Yama, as lord of the dead.⁴² Similarly, the general voice indicates that Dharma and Draupadī will be crowned at Hāstinapura (PP, 87), thus telescoping into the play another allusion to a forthcoming crowning ritual, the Paṭṭāpiṣṭhaka.

What is performed, however, is Draupadī's complete and final hair-tying (*kūntal muṭittal*). Curiously, Villi seems to attenuate this scene. Draupadī garlands her hair, but with no mention of her vow or of Duryodhana's blood. Kṛṣṇa merely counsels her to cease grieving for her sons, oversees the Pāṇḍavas' coronation at Hāstinapura, and departs for Dvāraka (10.44–46). One may suspect that Villi alludes to the rebraiding theme when he mentions the hair garland, and that he underplays it because he knows it is nonclassical. In any case, as the scene has its fullest development on the ritual ground of the paṭukaḷam rather than on the Terukkūttu stage, I leave its main treatment for volume 2 (but see already Hildebeitel 1981). Let us merely recall that Draupadī's vow involves not only the retying of her hair but the use of Duryodhana's blood for her hair oil, his ribs for a comb, and his intestines as a garland. It is the closing scene of the entire drama cycle, and the actors frequently repeat it as part of the ritual cycle later on that culminating day. Indeed, it is this drama-ritual continuum that probably explains the chapbook version's allusions to other forthcoming rituals.

The chapbook finally closes with a song that ends with praises of Kṛṣṇa and the rule of Dharma, but that begins as follows:

The Śakti Draupadī has fulfilled her vow.

The five of exceeding virtue have finished the battle.

The goddess who has obtained victory [*verrikonṭatēvi*] has tied up her kūntal.

The reference to victory (*verri*) is clearly an evocation of Durgā, the goddess of Victory. And just as Durgā stands on the head or back of Maṇiṣāsura, so Draupadī, in actual performance, mounts the musicians' platform and stands atop Duryodhana's thigh or chest while Kṛṣṇa, behind her, ties a string of red or orange flowers into her hair to form her kūntal. The garland of intestines, or even

42. In the Sanskrit epic it is not made explicit that Dharma, Yūdhiṣṭhira's father, is identical with Yama. To Draupadī cult informants, however, and especially the pāratyārs Venugopala Aiyar and Brameesa Mudaliyar, Yūdhiṣṭhira's father is Yama beyond doubt. On evocations of Yūdhiṣṭhira's connections with Yama in the Sanskrit epic, see Biardeau 1976, 171–72; 1978, 99–101.

heads, and the rib-comb are usually left to the memory or the imagination.⁴³

In fact, however, no scene could be played more differently than this one was on the occasions I observed it. In a shortened, sponsored performance at Cīṇṇapāpucamuttiram in 1982, the Pakkiri-pālaiyam troupe had Draupadī lift out her garland of Duryodhana's intestines in the form of white sheets. Five years earlier, in a festival at Tindivanam, the same troupe performed an unforgettably serene and beautiful version, set against a lovely dawn sky after a night of intermittent violent rains. A sinuously charming young Draupadī, played by the Pakkiri-pālaiyam troupe's most crowd-pleasing actor, stepped first on Duryodhana's chest and then on his thigh (plate 32). Then, as Kṛṣṇa tied the orange flowers into her hair, the audience arose as one with an audible sigh of release and participation in the goddess's moment of victory and fulfillment. Indeed, one enraptured boy in front of me made motions of tying a garland into his own hair (plate 33). For a finale, Kṛṣṇa and Draupadī were joined on the platform by Aśvatthāman in an expression of reconciliation and of the unity of action of these three embodiments of Viṣṇu, the goddess, and Śiva.

At the Mēlaccēri festival in 1982, however, an entirely different, and much darker side of the goddess was revealed in this scene. After a far less charming Draupadī had put up her hair and descended from her stance above the fallen Duryodhana, she swooned offstage, swallowed the flame from a camphor light pūjā (*dīpārādhana*) that was offered to her, and collapsed in a state of possession while attendants placed a tray of "cooling" turmeric powder on her head (plate 34). This swallowed flame no doubt served to announce that Draupadī remains in a possessed and heated state that will not be cooled until the completion of her firewalk.

Before we turn to the myths that account for that event, however, let us not leave "Eighteenth-Day War" without recapitulating the loose ends it has allowed us to tie together. For one thing, with Duryodhana we have both a mythic image of the redeemed demon and a more specifically ritual evocation of the Buffalo Demon as the goddess's sacrificial victim. For even if mythically Duryodhana is redeemed only by his compassion for his nephews, Draupadī's children, iconographically Draupadī's stance upon him replicates that of Durgā upon Mahiṣa and implies his salvation at her feet. Indeed, has he not gone to worship Draupadī in her temple just before the enactment of his final duel?

43. Where Draupadī's vow calls for the blood of Duṣśāsana, such details are much the same (see Venkatesa Acharya 1981, 359–61).

I need not belabor the affinities between the enactment of the death of Duryodhana and the mythology and cult of the water buffalo. They are more complicated than I once thought (Hiltebeitel 1982b, 91–95), but they are still decisive and will be taken up again in my study of Draupadī cult rituals. Let us just retrace the theme as we have followed it mythically through the dramas: Gāndhārī's ruing that her daughters-in-law are like a herd of she-buffaloes and being reminded by the gypsy Draupadī that her first marriage was to a "preliminary sacrificial" goat; Duryodhana's lust for Draupadī and Draupadī's taunting laughter, both enriched as evocations of the mythology of Durgā and Mahiṣa; Draupadī's collaboration with Arjuna Vijayāmpāl in the deception of Pōrmaṇṇaṇ; and finally the blood-drinking of Duḥśāsana preliminary to the death of Duryodhana. Furthermore, Draupadī's stance as goddess of Victory atop Duryodhana's body not only reveals her in a pose of Durgā, but, with the rebraiding of her hair, brings to an end the period in which she has assumed the dishevelled "form of Kālī" in the forests and at Kurukṣetra. One thus sees how "Eighteenth-Day War" can mark the completion of a festival—often in nine or ten days—that recapitulates the Navarātra and Vijayādaśamī to Durgā.

Finally, in this culminating drama, we have also seen why it has been necessary to insist that the tacit ritual presence of Pōttu Rāja and the mythic prelude to the *Mahābhārata* war supplied by his nom de guerre Pōrmaṇṇaṇ must be viewed, in their impact upon the Draupadī cult's *Mahābhārata*, as a double evocation. The head that Pōttu Rāja holds in his hand is not only a multiform of the head (or heads) of the Buffalo Demon. It is also a multiform of the head of Brahmā. Both are images of death and salvation: one on the individual scale of the demon devotee, and the other on the cosmic scale of the dissolution of the universe. We shall return to the latter theme one more time in our concluding chapter. Moreover, the double evocation of the death of Mahiṣa and the head of Brahmā involves the same conjunction of sacrificial and pralayic imagery that one finds in the classical *Mahābhārata*, only there, at least most prominently, the evocations are of a different pair of rites and myths. Rather than the buffalo sacrifice, the sacrifice of battle in the classical epic is oriented around the Brāhmaṇic animal sacrifice, and above all, if Biardeau is right, the horse sacrifice. The pralayic imagery is evoked, not directly through the Brahmaśirascheda, but through the myth of Dakṣa's sacrifice.⁴⁴ These trans-

44. See Hiltebeitel 1976a, 310–35, and Scheuer 1982, 293–339. I accept Scheuer's criticisms of my now-abandoned argument for a chronological divide between the epic's sacrificial and pralayic themes.

formations in the Draupadī cult *Mahābhārata* are still consistent with the epic's underlying pralayaic and sacrificial groundplan. But they are developed, as we should expect, around a reinterpretation centered on the cult and myths of the goddess: her defeat of the Buffalo Demon and her reunion with Śiva. We have seen how the first theme is reworked in the Draupadī cult around the figure of Pōttu Rāja-Pōrmanṇaṇ. And we have now seen how the second is evoked in myths involving Aṅkāḷammaṇ at Mēl Malaiyaṇūr and Durgā at Tiruvannamalai: myths in which these goddesses join Śiva's left side once the head they hold—whether Brahmā's fifth or Mahiṣa's last—falls to the ground. Such head-holding myths are normally told of Bhairava, for it is usually he, and not the goddess, who holds the head of Brahmā. We have now seen that Bhairava is the pan-Hindu prototype for the head-holding Pōttu Rāja. Let us further see whether the holding of the head as a sign of the reunion of the goddess with Śiva also has its repercussions in the myths and rites of the cult of Draupadī.

19 When Draupadī Walked on Fire

The full sweep of the Draupadī cult's vision of the *Mahābhārata* takes in the notion that Draupadī walked on fire. Indeed, the fire-walk (*tīmiti*, *tīmitittal*, literally "fire-trampling")¹ is the climactic ceremony of the cult's ritual cycle, and we have seen numerous allusions to it in our myths and dramas. It is not, however, the subject of any play, and has no scheduled place among the *pāratīyārs'* *Piracāṅkam* topics. In fact, *pāratīyārs* were found with very different attitudes toward the firewalk. Adikeshava Bharatīyar, for instance, will lead the firewalkers over the coals. But Brameesa Mudaliyar, who used to perform the ritual carrying a copy of the *Villipāratam*, discontinued firewalking in about 1972; and in the remaining ten years of his life, he took to announcing at festivals that the practice is merely traditional and should be stopped because it is dangerous and without epic foundation.

Nonetheless, the *pāratīyārs* and dramatists have, as one would expect, a prominent place among those who know the myths of Draupadī's firewalk. No treatment of the Draupadī cult's *Mahābhārata* mythology could be complete without their accounts. We thus come to the second point where we must look at myths tied primarily to Draupadī cult rituals rather than to the official performance repertoire of the itinerant dramatists and *pāratīyārs*. It is here that we see how the epic mythology tied to the locally performed ritual cycle provides closure to the *Pāratam* of these professionals. In brief, the main period of intensified *Pāratam*—the period dominated by the *Terukkūttu*—is ideally framed by the killing of

1. It is perhaps not without significance that the verb *miti*, "trample," is the same one used by Draupadī in her vow to trample *Aśvatthāman's* head (see, e.g., Caṇmukakkavirāyar 1969, vol. 3, *Cavittika Parvam*, p. 83). The potential link between the trampled head and the firewalk is paralleled and in a certain sense actualized in the *Āṅkāḷamman* cult, where the head is trampled in the crematorium not amid hot coals but in their ashes.

Baka, a local ritual evoking village sacrifices of humans and buffaloes, and the firewalk. While the killing of Baka is performed far less frequently than the firewalk, it is the fact that both—as myths—evoke village rituals even when merely recited that provides the significance of their closure of the performed festival *Mahābhārata*.

In discussing the mythology of Draupadī's firewalk, it is best to begin with the popular notion that Draupadī makes the coals cool for her firewalking devotees. While this notion is tied in more with firewalking rituals than with any epic-related myths, it has mythic dimensions. Thus Draupadī is sometimes said to make the coals fresh and cool like flowers or to drape her hair or her sarees over the coals (Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi 1983, 215; Babb 1974, 1, 40–41; Macready 1888–89, 192; Somander 1951, 614). We hardly need remind ourselves of the resonances of these ritual symbols in the Draupadī cult *Mahābhārata*. Let us only recall that Aṅkālamman also spreads her hair over the area in which she protects her Cemṭavar devotees.

As to the myths of Draupadī's firewalk, they are sometimes offered with conviction, and sometimes rather tentatively. Thanks no doubt to such pāratyārs as Brameesa Mudaliyar and others knowledgeable about classical epic traditions, there is clearly some awareness that Draupadī's firewalk has no ready epic justification. Moreover, some informants were aware of several variants on this theme, and thus regarded each with some uncertainty (see Babb 1974, 29). But this tentative quality of the firewalk myths does not diminish their significance, for the ways that they have been connected with the *Mahābhārata* reveal a series of fragmented but important contextual keys to some of the perceived meanings of the epic as well as of the firewalk.

The picture, however, is not really so diffuse. When one gathers all the accounts from published sources and my own fieldwork, there are actually only three clear epic contexts in which the firewalk is said to have occurred. The three were all mentioned to Babb by his Draupadī cult informants in Singapore, along side a fourth account—interesting in its premise but indeterminate in its setting—that “the test was proposed by Krishna who set a forest alight through which Draupadi walked unscathed” (1974, 29). With Kṛṣṇa as the instigator, it is likely that this story is a distant echo of one of the “postwar” firewalk myths we shall meet below, with perhaps some further echoes of the burning of the Khāṇḍava Forest or the forest of Draupadī's exile. Let us then take up the three more definite contexts in their epic order. The first two are rather straightforward, while the third—the postwar setting—admits a

number of variants that suggest it is indeed the point of greatest mythic intensification.

The first context is Draupadī's marriage. As already noted in our discussion of this episode in chapter 9, it is Villi who makes the oldest connection of this kind:

After thus performing the marriage [with Dharma], she entered/bathed in turn in the very hot loving fire which gave birth to her,² and emerged again, with full black hair, a chaste lady like the north star [that is, like Arundhati]; in this way the other four [Pāṇḍavas] married her. (1.5.96)

The commentators agree that Villi is depicting a repeated "entry into fire" (*akkiṇṇipiravēcam*).³ Since he probably knew the Draupadī cult in its early development, it is conceivable that his verse reflects a popular tradition of his time, or even an attempt to give the folk ritual of firewalking a *locus classicus* in the epic. In this light, whether it was his intention or not, Villi's marital firewalk is clearly an untroubled one, and annuls the inauspicious overtones of any post-war firewalk that might have provided an alternative setting, allowing him to retain as well his auspicious version of the end of the war.

In any case, the notion that Draupadī entered fire to confirm her chastity after each of her five marriages still has some currency in the Draupadī cult.⁴ Moreover, for her to reappear chaste each time from the fire of her birth is a theme that brings Villi's passage close to the Draupadī cult's theology of virginity. But the marriage setting is not frequently cited, and most notably, it was uniformly ignored by all the pāratīyārs interviewed, who might have been expected to have extracted it from Villi.

The second setting is one never mentioned by any of my informants, though it cannot be unknown in Tamilnadu (see Stokes 1873, 191). It tells that Draupadī performed her firewalk to confirm her purity after she had been touched by Kīcaka. It is not, however, clear from these accounts when she is supposed to have done this: whether directly after Kīcaka's death while she is still in disguise (perhaps in connection with the cremation of Kīcaka and his hundred

2. The fire is "loving" or "affectionate" (*kātal*) in the sense that it doesn't harm her.

3. See Kōpālakirūṣṇamācāriyar 1976, 1: 331; Rājakōpālācāriyār 1970, 1: 334; cf. Subramanian 1967, 46. On the term *akkiṇṇipiravēcam*, see chap. 18, n. 14.

4. It was mentioned by nonspecialist adherents of the cult at Sowcarpet in Madras and at Tindivanam, and it was also known to the eighteenth-century Tamil informants of Sonnerat (1782, 248). See also Francis 1906, 99; Babb 1974, 29; Mialaret 1969, 23.

and five brothers,⁵ whom Bhīma slaughters to prevent them from placing Draupadī on Kīcaka's funeral pyre), or before or even after the war. Whatever the context, here again the firewalk confirms Draupadī's sexual purity, though this time the focus is her extra-marital violation rather than her marriage. This setting reflects the same logic as the "fire entry" that restores Sītā to Rāma in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and also the practice traditional to several South Indian castes of requiring women caught in adultery to pass through fire before they can be restored to their husbands.⁶

This then brings us to the proliferation of stories concerned with a firewalk after the war. Plainly these make the most sense in connection with the ritual cycle, which invariably—to my knowledge—has the firewalk follow ceremonies that enact the war's conclusion.

First, one has certain accounts that, like the two already described, regard the firewalk as a confirmation of Draupadī's sexual purity. One such myth, narrated by Adaikala Bharatiyar, an elderly pāratīyār from Udaiyarpalayam Taluk, Tiruchirappalli District, and gathered for me by Pon Kothandaraman, is the following. After Bhīma, risking life and limb, brought Draupadī the heavenly Saurāṅghika flower to console her during her forest exile, Draupadī said she would save the flower to put into her hair at the end of the war.⁷ But when she was ready to do this, she found that one petal had wilted. So Bhīma told her that she should walk on fire to confirm her chastity. This account is unique in invoking a link between the two main rituals of the culminating day of the festival: the tying and garlanding of Draupadī's hair (*kūṇṭal muṭittal*) and the firewalk. Unfortunately, I do not have its narrator's explanation of the nature of Draupadī's impurity that wilts the one petal. However, we do have other myths, without such an incident, that explain Draupadī's firewalk as rite of postwar purification. Thus various accounts attest that Draupadī walked on coals to purify herself of the Kauravas' mistreatment (Mitra 1936, 179; Lewis 1931, 517), or even to demonstrate her purity after they had held her so long "in captivity" (Babb 1974, 29; Blaive, Penaud, and Nicoli 1974, 356)—a notion probably transposed from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, in which

5. This is their number in *Mbh.* 4.22.28, whereas *KC*, 83, has 104.

6. See Thurston and Rangachari 1904, 3: 436–37 (Koragas); 4: 51 (Koyis); 6: 132 (Paraiyans). Cf. also the Telugu Komati caste myth in *ibid.* 3: 310–20, and its "Mahābhāratized" Tamil version in Whitehead 1921, 123.

7. See chap. 13, sec. A; Adaikala Bharatiyar called it the Pārijāta flower, apparently a borrowing from the myth in which Kṛṣṇa steals the heavenly tree by this name from Indra so that his wife Satyabhāmā can wear its flowers in her braids (*Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 5.30).

Sītā must enter fire at the end of the war to prove her chastity after being held captive by Rāvaṇa. We have also noted the possibility that Draupadī may purify herself after the war of her contact with Kīcaka. But perhaps we would do better not to ask for only one mythic defilement as the source of the wilted petal. Draupadī's defilement, from the dice match through the war, has surely been cumulative, especially if we take into account her forest and battlefield transformations. The connection made in Adaikala Bharatīyār's account between the firewalk and the ritual context of the tying up of Draupadī's hair reminds us that all along Draupadī's dishevelment has been a symbol of her impurity (see Hildebeitel 1981). Furthermore, it is precisely when she is about to dress her hair with Duryodhana's blood—the fulfillment of her vengeful vow but also an act of intensified self-defilement—that the petal is seen to be wilted. It would seem that the wilted petal is another indication of Draupadī's impure and "heated" state at the moment of her hair-dressing, like the tray of cooling turmeric powder placed on her head at the end of the Mēlaccēri performance of "Eighteenth-Day War."

It is noteworthy that the only Draupadī cult "professional" to tell a myth that ascribes Draupadī's firewalk to a postwar purification was a pāratīyār from Tiruchirappalli District. Moreover, only in his account do we meet with any mythic complexity or epic sophistication in the tale. Within our core area, such myths were found only among what one might call the cult's general public, which yielded only vague and tentative variations on the purification theme much like those found at Draupadī cult diaspora sites in Singapore and Reunion Island (see, again, Babb 1974; Lewis 1931; and Blaive, Penaud, and Nicoli 1974). However, the main myth known to the "professionals"—both the pāratīyārs and the dramatists⁸—within the core area is one of considerable ingenuity. We follow the version of Adikeshava Bharatīyār:

After the war is over, Dharma is desolate. He laments his responsibility for the deaths of Karna, who should have been king, of Bhīṣma, and others. Having come to Hāstinapura to be coronated, he has no will to rule, despite Kṛṣṇa's entreaties that he prepare to do so. Around him he sees the womenfolk weeping, wailing, having lost their husbands in battle. "Why

8. Along with the cited version, I gathered variants from the pāratīyār Venugopala Aiyar and from my two main dramatist informants. Another was narrated to Biardeau (in press) by a Brahman informant at the Kūttampākkam Draupadī temple. All are from informants from either North or South Arcot.

should I rule and be happy while others are weeping," he asks Kṛṣṇa.

At this impasse, Kṛṣṇa decides to do a trick. He calls Draupadī and reminds her of her birth from fire. He tells her to create another sacrificial fire [*yākam*] and walk through it. "Ordinarily people won't walk through fire, but knowing that you were born in fire, if you say they will get back their children, husbands, etc., they will follow you, believing that by doing so they will get their loved ones back, that those whom they lost in battle will come back to life. When this is done, Dharma's coronation [*paṭṭāpicēkam*] can then proceed."

This Pāñcālī then enters the fire and comes out, because of her powers. But the others who follow do not come out, as they are ordinary men, women, and children. They all die in the fire. Only Pāñcālī-Śakti comes out. So now there are no more voices of wailing or weeping, nothing to deter Dharma from becoming king. This is another aspect of Kṛṣṇa's trick. The scene is now calm, auspicious. Dharma has no disturbances. And the ones who died did rejoin their loved ones, but in heaven. Their bodies, flesh and blood, were destroyed by the fire, but their souls were released. So people walk on fire now.

A full exposition of this somber story would require more familiarity with the Draupadī cult firewalking ritual than I can provide here, but let us note the following points. First, one should catch the pāratyār's seeming slip into a ritual idiom. Though it is the women's wailing that disturbs Dharma, men, women, and children—a conventional contingent of firewalkers—follow Draupadī into the fire. In other versions of this myth, only women join her: according to Venugopala Aiyar, fifty women on her left and fifty on her right, that is, the hundred widows of the Kauravas (cf. also Biardeau, in press). Let us also note the theme of revival. As we have seen, Draupadī cult rituals sometimes include a ceremony for the revival of Draupadī's sons, the "Young Pañcapāṇḍavas." Now the Kaurava women seek to attain the same end so that they can be reunited with their children and husbands, but Kṛṣṇa reunites them only in heaven. It must rank among his most unsavory "tricks," but its theology is no different from the many others in which the Draupadī cult *Mahābhārata* delights. Indeed, with the exception that it is Draupadī who becomes Kṛṣṇa's "instrument," it is no different from the theology of *Bhagavad Gītā* 11.32–33, in which Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna to be his "mere instrument" (see Hiltebeitel 1980c, 160) in the pralayaic slaughter of Kurukṣetra. The firepit

is not only a "sacrificial fire" that claims its exemplary victims and releases their souls from their bodies. It is the last fire on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra, the completion of the *Mahābhārata*'s "sacrifice of battle," and like the *Mahābhārata* war itself, an image of the Pralaya. Moreover, in making suttees out of the Kaurava widows, it evokes the imagery of the crematorium: the domain of Aṅkālaṃman. Note here that it is no longer Draupadī's impurity that requires her to walk on fire, but the disturbances of these *asumankaḷis*, the inauspicious women who carry the impurity of widowhood. In fact, it is a recurrent theme in Tamil folk epics for the heroine to devise involuntary suttees for the widows who have in one way or another been her rivals.⁹ But the most astonishing multiform of this Draupadī cult myth occurs at the end of a North Indian folk epic, the *Ālhā*, where the chief heroine, Bēlā, who is an incarnation of Draupadī, lights her own funeral pyre with flame that comes forth miraculously from her loosened hair. Rather than spread itself protectively over the coals into which she once drew the Kaurava widows to their deaths, the hair of *this* reborn Draupadī is dishevelled because she is now a widow herself, her slain husband having been an incarnation of Arjuna. And the pyre she lights for her own suttee stays alight to receive the widows of all the other heroes who fought on the side of the reincarnated Pāṇḍavas, whose time has finally come to taste defeat in a great turning of the tables (Waterfield 1923, 271–73; Schomer 1984).

One feature of our Draupadī cult account still requires further notice, however, for it leads directly to our last postwar firewalk myth. To be sure, the wailing and weeping of the Kaurava women are what Kṛṣṇa and Draupadī clear away. But the account begins with Dharma's lamenting his complicity in the sinful slayings of so many of the Pāṇḍavas' foes. In removing the mourners, Draupadī's firewalk addresses this more fundamental problem simply by relieving him of its most disturbing reminders. In other accounts, it is precisely the battle deaths that weigh upon the Pāṇḍavas and demand expiation in the firewalk. In our core area, aside from its transparency as a subtheme in the "professional" accounts, we have met such a notion as an independent variant only once, from a knowledgeable observer at the 1977 Tindivanam festival

9. In the *Elder Brothers Story* the twins' sister Tankāl, invoking Viṣṇu, burns alive the widows of her brothers Caṅkar and Poṇṇar in their "Palace of Prosperity" (Beck, n.d., 283–84); in a folk *Rāmāyaṇa*, Sītā secures the help of Hanumān and a "good demon" to "push all the widows of the Rākṣasa warriors into a huge funeral pyre" so that they can enjoy "bliss together with their husbands in the heaven of heroes" (Shulman 1986, 113).

who referred to it as a common tradition.¹⁰ In his words, because the Pāṇḍavas committed so many sins in killing their elder brother, guru, and so on, they made a firepit so that by crossing it they could wipe their sins away and recover from them. A similar mythology is alluded to by Somander in his description of a village Draupadī festival in the Batticaloa District of northeast Sri Lanka. There the firewalk is said to be "a special rite observed by the victors in honor of Agni, the God of Fire, who purifies those whose souls are tainted with the slaughter of millions on the battlefield" (1951, 612).

These accounts locate the impurity or, more precisely, sin that the firewalk removes as one that adheres to the Pāṇḍavas rather than to Draupadī. But they seem to cut off at the point of telling us what connection this firewalk would have with Draupadī herself. Given all we know that links the Draupadī cult firewalk with its goddess, and above all the ritual fact that some image of Draupadī seems always to be carried across the coals along with an image of at least one of her husbands, most typically Arjuna, it is hard to imagine that these accounts would imply that Draupadī does not participate in the mythic firewalks along with the Pāṇḍavas.

Fortunately, we have a very important account that answers these uncertainties. It is the myth told to explain the firewalk on the eighteenth day of the early nineteenth-century Draupadī festival at Dindigul. I alluded to it cryptically in chapter 7, thus reserving it—for reasons I must now address—for this book's conclusion. According to this Mackenzie manuscript, after the war the Pāṇḍavas became afflicted with madness (*paṭṭiyam*) because of the deaths of the eighteen *akṣauhiṇīs*, the deaths of their relatives, and the sin of Brahmanicide. In this plight, "Krishnaswami called for Draupadī and told her, 'If you should do some penance [*tavacu* = *tapas*] to Īśvaran [Śiva], getting into the fire-ground [*akkiṇi-tarai*], increasing the fire [*akkiṇi valarttu*], and walking in that fire, then the Brahmanicide [*piramahattiyam*] of the five persons will go away.' " Draupadī then does as Kṛṣṇa has directed, freeing the Pāṇḍavas from their sin. Here we have the reverse situation from that noted in the Tindivanam and Sri Lanka accounts, and here too we must reckon with the implication that the crossing of the coals is also done by Draupadī and the Pāṇḍavas together.

What is striking about this Dindigul myth is the specificity of its description of the Pāṇḍavas' sin. Afflicting them above all is the "madness" of Brahmanicide. Let us recall that the tensions gen-

10. J. Parthasarathi, as of 1977 assistant professor of Tamil, Government Arts College, Tindivanam.

erated in "Dice Match and Disrobing" turn both the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas into "madmen," *piccarkaḷ*, a term with the same etymology—both deriving from Sanskrit *pitta*, "bile"—as the *paṭṭiyam* that is now said to afflict them after the war. In one sense, we may suspect, the Pāṇḍavas never really lose this initial "madness"; it is carried from the dice match and disrobing through the forests to Kurukṣetra as a complement to Draupadī's vows of revenge. Indeed, the madness that afflicts them in this firewalk myth is surely evocative of possession, and we recall that within our core area, the participants in the firewalking ritual are commonly understood to be the Pāṇḍava army, successfully following Draupadī and the Pāṇḍavas across the fires of Kurukṣetra. In this context, we should also recall Frasca's suggestion that it is the Pāṇḍavas who possess members of the "Dice Match and Disrobing" audience. If it is not clear that the Pāṇḍavas actually possess their "publics" in these two contexts, it is clear at least in the firewalk—where possession is common though not required—that they serve as "possession models."

But it is equally clear at the firewalk that they are not the only such models, and this is what is so revealing about the Dindigul myth. The model for the Pāṇḍavas' madness of Brahmanicide is ultimately none other than the Brahmanicide Śiva—a point that allows us to insist once again that the affinities between the Pāṇḍavas and Śiva are what unlock so many of the theological implications, not only of the Draupadī cult *Mahābhārata*, but of the classical epic itself (see Hildebeitel 1980c; 1982b, 82; 1984a, 15–26). But it is, of course, not so much Śiva's Brahmanicide alone that provides the model, as Śiva's Brahmanicide after it has been evoked, reworked, multiformed, paralleled, and transposed—in a process of such complexity the mythologist must use all his metaphoric tools—into the Draupadī cult mythology of the severed head, which revolves around the figure of Pōttu Rāja-Pōrmannan. If the Pāṇḍavas suffer for the sin of Brahmanicide, they suffer for the sin of killing their Brahman guru Droṇa. That sin, as we saw at the end of chapter 18, lies near the bottom of the mythological palimpsest that after centuries of fadings and erasures leaves only Pōttu Rāja in full view.

Although the sin of slaying Droṇa is widely diffused in the *Mahābhārata* (see Hildebeitel 1976a, 253–54), Arjuna grieves that it afflicts all of the Pāṇḍavas jointly (7.167.41–42). So it is now with their madness. When, however, Droṇa's beheading is recognized as a Brahmanicide evocative of the severing of the fifth head of Brahmā, as it is by Villi, it follows that there must be some special

treatment of the head.¹¹ Villi goes no further than to evoke that Brahmanicide image when Aśvatthāman holds the five heads of the “Young Pañcapāṇḍavas.” But the Draupadī cult goes beyond this.

One striking use of this image has been found by Shideler (1987, 186) at the 1986 Pondicherry festival. At the end of the war, Kṛṣṇa asks Aravāṇ what he had seen in his eighteen-day vigil, and Aravāṇ replies that the war consisted of only two things: Kṛṣṇa’s discus lopping off heads, and a kapāla (skull bowl) collecting all the blood. The destination of this variant of the Brahmaśiras is not certain, but it is clearly implied that with the end of the war its work has stopped. In terms of the Dindigul myth, however, we would expect that the head, the symbol of Brahmanicide, would have to be brought to the firepit to release the Pāṇḍavas from their madness. In the classical myth, Śiva or Bhairava must bring Brahmā’s fifth head to Banaras, the luminous (*kāśī*) city of cremations that survives the fires of the Pralaya, before it will fall from his hand. Alternatively, and still more pointedly, Śiva or Aṅkāḷammaṇ must carry Brahmā’s head until it drops, for Aṅkāḷammaṇ to trample it, on the Mēl Malaiyaṇūr crematorium. In this context, let us recall that the Aṅkāḷammaṇ cult is not the only South Indian folk cult to give play to a reworking of the fiery imagery of Kāśī-Banaras. We have seen that Kāśī in the *Elder Brothers Story*, the folk epic from a Kongunad hero cult, is a double of Pōrmaṇṇaṇ–Pōta Rāju’s “City of the Bliss of Śiva,” and I voiced my suspicion that the doubling works both ways (see chap. 16, sec. B). Kāśī also surfaces directly into Draupadī cult epic folklore in the drama on the Pāṇḍavas’ escape from the burning of the lacquer house (chap. 9, sec. C).

The Dindigul myth, however, tells us only that the Pāṇḍavas’ Brahmanicidal madness will be dispelled if Draupadī crosses the

11. It is gratifying to see that E.-C. Visuvalingam (in press) comes independently, and via a different route, to the same conclusion about the link between the Śiva-Bhairava mythology of Brahmā’s fifth head and the epic beheading of Droṇa. Notably, following Dessigane, Pattabiramin, and Filliozat 1964, 62, she cites a Gingee region variant from Kanchipuram in which it is Arjuna himself who must atone for Droṇa’s slaying. Also incisive is her treatment of Arjuna as double recipient of the Pāśupata-Brahmaśiras: once through Droṇa the Brahman, and once through the Kirāta-outcaste-hunter Śiva. It is the same caste range one finds in Pōttu Rāja, and helps one grasp further how the head in his hand is a double of Arjuna’s doomsday weapon. Moreover, Śiva is a (deer-)hunter in the Brāhmaṇa myths that stand behind the myths of Brahmā’s beheading. Finally, also important is her discussion of the relation between these myths of Arjuna and Śiva and the prior mythology of Indra’s Brahmanicides. Arjuna is “initiated” by both Indra and Śiva in obtaining the Pāśupata-Brahmaśiras, and he is identified with both throughout the classical as well as the folk epic tradition (Hiltebeitel 1980c; 1984a, 24–26).

firepit. Now we know that Draupadī does not carry or trample severed heads. Furthermore, clearly Dhṛṣṭadyumna cannot carry Droṇa's head, for he has already flung it away or shot it off with an arrow and been beheaded in turn for the outrage. But Draupadī does have someone who carries heads for her, and that of course is Pōttu Rāja-Pōrmaṇṇan, Dhṛṣṭadyumna's irrepressible understudy and successor. In core-area firewalking rituals, his icon is usually carried across the coals directly behind a decorated pot (*karakam*) that represents Draupadī, and ahead of the reunited Draupadī and Arjuna on their palanquin—"chariot" (*tēr*). Indeed, given Dhṛṣṭadyumna's unavailability at the postwar firewalk, we now see another factor in his eclipse by Pōttu Rāja: he cannot carry a head across the firepit. We cannot know whether Pōrmaṇṇan—still found at Dindigul in his wooden processional icons—carried a head across the fire there in the early nineteenth century. The Dindigul firewalk is long discontinued. But we can now see why in our core area it is not just Pōttu Rāja who holds a head for Draupadī at Gingee, but Pōrmaṇṇan who also holds one for her and for the Pāṇḍavas at Kurukṣetra. When Pōrmaṇṇan holds a head and not just a lion or some other animal, we may still regard it as the head of his "father," or his former demon self, or perhaps even of Aravāṇ. No Draupadī cult symbol except fire is more overdetermined. But the head in Pōrmaṇṇan's hand is also what has become, symbolically, of the Brahman head of Droṇa, the severed head that comes to symbolize the madness of Brahmanicide.

We have seen, however, that the head-holding myths of the Draupadī cult core area also coincide with another iconic mytheme: that of Ardhanārīśvara, "the lord who is half woman." Both in the Aṅkāḷmaṇṇan cult and in the Tiruvannamalai myth linking Pārvatī's penance with her transformation into Durgā to defeat Mahiṣa, the resorption of the goddess into Śiva's left side cannot occur until the head—in one case Brahmā's, in the other Mahiṣa's—is released. It may in fact be that such a coincidence is also implied in the mythology of Banaras, for the Kāśī to which Bhairava must go to release Brahmā's head is also the body of the goddess with whom Śiva longs to reunite, as well as being the lingam of light that outlasts the Pralaya and in which Śiva and Śakti are one (Eck 1982, 299, 309). But the Banaras mythology seems to make no explicit correlation between the release of Brahmā's head and the Ardhanārīśvara. Here it would seem that we are dealing with a specifically South Indian articulation, one that is especially deep-rooted in Tamil tradition. For the Ardhanārīśvara has probably its oldest literary antiquity in South India, traceable to Caṅkam-period Tamil poetry (Adiceam 1968, 147–48). It has a uniquely rich Tamil de-

velopment in sculptural representation (*ibid.*, esp. 163–64), and it has a rich flowering in local mythologies in diverse areas of Tamilnadu. Here it is sufficient to note that the incident that begins Pārvatī's estrangement from Śiva in the Tiruvannamalai myth—her playfully ignorant mistake of covering Śiva's eyes with her hands and plunging the worlds into darkness—is also linked at Tiruchengode (Salem District) with the myth of the goddess's penance to reclaim Śiva's left side (*ibid.*, 145–46). There is furthermore a recurrent theme that the goddess is reunited with Śiva not only in an anthropomorphic form, but as the left side of the lingam (Shulman 1980a, 163, 269): a position in which deserving devotees, while taking *darśan*, can "see" the goddess and Śiva as one at five Ardhanārīśvara temples in Kallakurichi Taluk in South Arcot (Adiceam 1968, 163; cf. Nambiar et al 1966, 350). One is reminded of the combination of themes at Banaras linking Śiva and the goddess with the lingam of light.

What is most significant for our purposes in the Tamil myths has been noticed by Adiceam. Rather than providing prototypes for cosmogonic or procreative functions as they sometimes do, somewhat diffidently, in certain Sanskrit Purāṇas, the Tamil Ardhanārīśvara myths repeatedly tell of the goddess's resorption into Śiva's left side as a cycle-ending reunion (see Adiceam 1968, 144–45). Yet Adiceam persists in seeing the image primarily as one of the procreative role of the primal pair (*ibid.*, 143). Similarly Shulman (1980a, 351) and O'Flaherty (1980, 310–20), while recognizing the reunited form as one that makes conventional procreative activity impossible, also see it as an image of androgynous creativity. No doubt it has this resonance. But in the contexts in which we have found it, I think we must recognize it primarily, not as a cosmogonic or procreative image, but as an image of dissolution. Indeed, in its coincidence in the *Aṅkāḷamman* cult with the release of the doomsday weapon, the head of Brahmā, it is an image of the reunion of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*—spirit and matter—at the *Mahāpralaya* or "great dissolution" of the universe. The fusion of Śiva and the goddess into one body must always hold the potential for resplitting and renewing the procreative tasks of creation. But that function is not what has immediate force in these myths.

If we return one last time, then, from *Aṅkāḷamman*'s crematorium to Draupadī's firepit, we find, as so often in the relation between their mythologies, an analogous set of elements with different accentuations. Draupadī has no mythology of rejoining Śiva's left side. Yet as we have seen, when she crosses the firepit, she does so reunited with her husbands, and most specifically with Arjuna. Their icons usually cross the coals on one palanquin, with

Draupadī to Arjuna's left. In tracing the complementary mythology of the carried head, we have observed that while the Draupadī cult firewalk evokes the symbolism of Aṅkāḷamman's crematorium and the Pralaya, it does not fully reenact either: Pōttu Rāja carries the head across the fire without releasing it, thereby continuing his guardianship of a goddess who oversees the procreative functions of clans and their lands. Similarly, the androgyne image is not realized fully because, like the dropped head, it implies the dissolution of such procreative and generative functions. But the Draupadī cult has not omitted the Ardhanārīśvara. Instead of it being a goal for the estranged goddess, it is a destiny of the estranged Arjuna.¹² This image is anticipated in the claim that Arjuna, the hero with his own fish mark, has a special "left-handed knowledge" that allows him to shoot the fish that wins Draupadī as his bride. But it is while the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī live separately in their period of concealment that Arjuna actually takes on the disguise of the "lord who is half woman." It is a distinctly chaste disguise, brought on by a curse that Arjuna live like a eunuch. It is a nongenerative image, since it is in this form that he relinquishes the right to father the sole heir to the dynasty, through Uttarā. And it is a role in which his main task is the destructive one of humiliating the Kauravas at the cattle raid as a foreshadowing of their slaughter at Kurukṣetra.

Yet when images of Draupadī and Arjuna are carried across the firepit behind Pōttu Rāja, the Ardhanārīśvara theme—or at least the reunion of the male and the female—is ritually evoked even if it is not given epic mythical expression.¹³ And like the release from sins that goes with the carried head, these symbols of fusion and reunion provide a powerful image of transcendence for those who fulfill their firewalking vows. Thus if we look at our concluding myth against the full background of the Draupadī cult, we can complete our picture of the possession that unites the Pāṇḍavas with their festival army in the crossing of the fires of Kurukṣetra. It is a crossing designed by Kṛṣṇa and led by Draupadī and Pōrmaṇṇaṇ that finally cools this heated state, reunites the goddess Draupadī with Arjuna, her most Śiva-like husband, and releases one and all from the madness and impurity of their sins.

12. The transferral of this mytheme from the goddess to Arjuna rather than to Draupadī has analogues in the role of Arjuna-Vijayāmpāl in "Pōrmaṇṇaṇ's Fight," and in the transferral of the triple-breasted goddess theme to Bhīma's prior wife Hiḍimbi-Kamalakkanni (see chap. 10, sec. A). See also Shideler 1987, 183: a pāra-tiṃyār's account making Draupadī Kṛṣṇa's left shoulder, the two of them being truly one.

13. The firewalking rituals are in fact underscored by multiple symbols of male-female merging and reunion (see Hildebeitel 1982b, 78–84).

Lunar Dynasty



Appendix 2.

An Outline History of Gingee

Early Period

580–688	Pallava cave temples built at Mēlaccēri (Pallaveśvara) and Singavaram (Raṅganātha).
ca. 1190	Founding of Kōṇ dynasty by Ānanta Kōṇ; fortifications in Old Gingee (Mēlaccēri) and on the Rājagiri or Ānantagiri (named after Ānanta Kōṇ), the cliff-ringed Royal Fort (Rāja Kōṭṭai).
ca. 1240	Krishna Kōṇ succeeds Ānanta Kōṇ and fortifies the Krishnagiri (named after himself, now also the “Queen’s Fort”). Later, probably during the Nāyak and Maratha periods, these two peaks will be joined by massive ramparts with a third, the Cēntarāyan Durg (or Drug, “Fort”).

Fourteenth Century

1300–1330	End of Kōṇ dynasty.
1296–1335	Muslim raids; early conquests begin in the Deccan under Delhi sultans.
1311	Sack of Kanchipuram; Hoysalas made tributaries to Delhi sultans.
1327–28	Sack of Shrirangam, theft by Muslims of Shrirangam Raṅganātha image, recovered by Hindus and kept at Tirupati.
ca. 1330–36	Rise of Vijayanagar empire; Harihara I consecrated first Vijayanagar king in 1336.
1334–78	Establishment of Madurai sultanate (independent of Delhi sultans).
ca. 1335	Gajapati kings of Kalinga raid as far as South Arcot.
1340–42	Besieged Hoysalas seek strength in Gingee area; Gingee king Velāla Rāyar marries daughter of Hoysala king Ballāla III; Ballāla fortifies Tiruvannamalai, encamps there in conflict with Madurai sultanate.

For sources, see chap. 2, nn. 12–14.

- ca. 1344 Last Hoysala monarch disappears; kingdom absorbed into growing Vijayanagar empire.
- 1347 Emergence of Bāhmanī sultanate in Deccan.
- ca. 1331–83 Cāmbhuvarāyar (or Campurācaṇ) kings established in Gingee area (they are probably Vaṇṇiyars, Cāmbhuva being the name of a Vaṇṇiyar caste division); main fort at Paṭaivīṭu near Araṇi (Arni).
- ca. 1366 Cāmbhuvarāyars subdued by Kumāra Kampana, son of second Vijayanagar emperor, Bukka I; Kumāra Kampana sets up garrison at Kanchipuram and makes his capital at Viriṇcipuram on the Palar River.
- 1371–72 Gopānārya, Brahman general and effective ruler headquartered at Gingee, allied with Kumāra Kampana, secures Raṅganātha image from Tirupati; keeps it for a year at Singavaram Raṅganātha temple; then returns it to Shrirangam, defeating Muslim forces near Tiruchirappali to do so.
- 1378 Overthrow of Madurai sultanate by Kumāra Kampana, inspired by a vision of the goddess giving him a divine sword (originally from Śiva and Agastya) to oust the “invaders.”
- 1382– Vijayanagar ties strengthened in Gingee area; evidence from inscriptions; Gingee itself the likely head of a province.
- ca. 1370–1400 Villiputtūr Ālvār composes his *Makāpāratam*. The poet hailed from Tirumūṇaippāṭināṭu (the area around present-day Tirukoyilur Taluk, South Arcot) in the Draupadī cult heartland, and the work was commissioned by Varatapati Āṭkoṇṭāṇ, a chieftain ruling at Vakkapākai (a walled city on the Pennar River) who was a contemporary of one of the Cāmbuvarāyaṇ chieftains.

Fifteenth Century

- ca. 1400–1464 Gingee area continues under Vijayanagar sway but is not yet consolidated as a Nāyak “viceroyalty.” Vijayanagar rulers preoccupied with Bāhmanī sultanate in Deccan.
- 1464, 1479 Inscriptions hint at rule by early Nāyaks at Gingee. The 1479 inscription refers to persecution of Jains in the region.

Sixteenth Century

- 1505–29 Bāhmanī sultanate breaks up (1505–9) into five kingdoms, including Bijapur and Golconda, and Vijay-

- anagar kings Vīra Narasimha and Krishnadeva Rāya (1509–29) reorganize Nāyakates.
- 1509 Under Krishnadeva Rāya's orders, Vayappa Nāyak leads Vijayanagar army against Gingee area's local chieftains; consolidates area under one of his company, Tubākki Krishnappa Nāyakar, and divides southern realms under the Nāyaks of Gingee (Nellore to the Coleroon), Tanjore, and Madurai; he then is recalled to fight Muslim coalition (Bijapur, Golconda, Daulatabad).
- 1509–21 Reign of Tubākki Krishnappa Nāyakar, probable founder of Gingee line of Nāyak "kings" (1509–1648).
- 1565 Battle of Talikota: Vijayanagar empire shaken by Muslim forces.
- 1586 Start of long reign (ending 1620 or 1640) at Gingee of Krishnappa Nāyak, marked by assertions of independence against weakened empire.
- 1597 Father Pimenta's reference to Gingee as the "Troy of the East."

Seventeenth Century

- 1606 Vellore (North Arcot) established as capital of retreating Vijayanagars.
- 1607–17 Under Krishnappa Nāyak, Gingee twice joins opposition to Vijayanagar efforts at imperial reconsolidation. Local dealings with Portuguese and Dutch, in support of latter.
- 1617–ca. 1648 Krishnappa Nāyak and successors alternate between unstable alliance and opposition (siding with the "defector" Tirumala Nāyak of Madurai from ca. 1624 on) in relations with increasingly weakened Vijayanagar rulers. Dealings with British begin (Madras settled 1640).
- 1646, 1653 Emperor leaves Vellore (and Gingee area) for refuge in Mysore; effective end of Vijayanagar empire.
- 1647–48 First fall of Gingee to siege by Bijapur and Golconda; effective end of Nāyak rule in Gingee.
- 1648–77 Gingee under Bijapur (Muslim) rule. Khāns of Gingee deal with British and French (Pondicherry settled 1664).
- 1677 Śivāji captures Gingee, apparently on first assault.
- 1677–97 Gingee ruled by Śivāji's Maratha appointees and their successors.
- 1686–87 Fall of Bijapur and Golconda to imperial Mughals.
- 1690–97 Seven-year siege of Gingee by Zūlfikar Khān under orders from Mughal emperor Aurangzeb.
- 1697 Second fall of Gingee to Mughals; Gingee becomes a *killēdāri* under the nawab of Arcot.

Eighteenth Century

- 1700–1713 After brief direct Muslim rule under Nawab Daud Khān, Sarūp Singh, a Rajput Bundela chieftain (from northern Madhya Pradesh), is made *killēdār*. He refuses to pay tribute to the nawab from 1711 to 1713.
- 1714 Ten-month rule at Gingee of Sarūp Singh's son Rāja Desing, who is killed in battle on 3 October.
- 1714–18 Sādatullah Khān rules from Gingee, then returns to Arcot.
- 1714–1801 Gingee under nawabs of Arcot caught up in rivalries between nawabs and the nizām of the Deccan, the Marathas, French (who held the Gingee Fort from 1750 to 1761), British, and Tippu Sultan, said to have captured the fort in 1782. Regionally, a period of hardships.

Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

- 1801 Gingee and Arcot fall within the British rule of the Carnatic.
- 1802–3 Nārāyaṇaṇ Pillai composes the "History of Gingee." Area impoverished and depopulated throughout nineteenth century.
- 1718?–1916 Bundela Rajput descendants of Desing's line continue at Mēleccēri down to the last male, Sûrabanâden Singh.

Abbreviations

AA	<i>Arts Asiatiques</i>
AFS	<i>Asian Folklore Studies</i>
BEFEO	<i>Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient</i>
BSOAS	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
CA	<i>Current Anthropology</i>
CIS	<i>Contributions to Indian Sociology</i>
CR	<i>comptes rendus</i> (see Biardeau)
HR	<i>History of Religions</i>
IA	<i>Indian Antiquary</i>
IESHR	<i>Indian Economic and Social History Review</i>
IJ	<i>Indo-Iranian Journal</i>
JA	<i>Journal Asiatique</i>
JAF	<i>Journal of American Folklore</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JAS	<i>Journal of Asian Studies</i>
JASB	<i>Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay</i>
JIH	<i>Journal of Indian History</i>
JISOA	<i>Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art</i>
JRAS	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Tamil Studies</i>
QJMS	<i>Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society</i>
WZKSO	<i>Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Süd- und Ostasiens</i>

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26789824R00325

Made in the USA
Middletown, DE
06 December 2015

This is the first volume of a projected three-volume work on the little-known South Indian folk cult of the goddess Draupadī and on the classical epic, the *Mahābhārata*, that the cult brings to life in mythic, ritual, and dramatic forms. Draupadī, the chief heroine of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, takes on many unexpected guises in her Tamil cult, but her dimensions as a folk goddess remain rooted in a rich interpretive vision of the great epic. By examining the ways that the cult of Draupadī commingles traditions about the goddess and the epic, Alf Hiltebeitel shows the cult to be singularly representative of the inner tensions and working dynamics of popular devotional Hinduism.

Volume 1 focuses on the Draupadī cult's own double mythology, moving from its stories about Draupadī's "primal temple" near the capital of the medieval South Indian Kingdom of Gingee to its version of the *Mahābhārata* war on the North Indian plain of Kurukṣetra. Throughout, Hiltebeitel intertwines "regional" data, gathered from both oral and written sources, with the "epic," drawn from the cult's own performative traditions as well as from classical versions of the *Mahābhārata* in both Tamil and Sanskrit. Pivotal to the overlap of these Gingee and Kurukṣetra mythologies are two folk figures unknown to classical epic traditions: Draupadī's two guardians, Pōttu Rāja and Muttāl Rāvuttan.

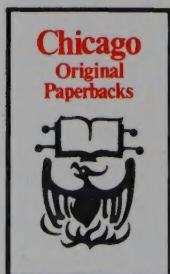
Hiltebeitel reexamines many issues critical to Indological studies, among them the oppositions of folk and classical, Sanskritic and vernacular, Vedic and Hindu, and popular and Brahmanic, as well as the interplay between village and region, text and performance, history and myth. He takes up these issues while breaking new ground in investigating the further rapport between the Hindu goddess and the Indian epics. Future volumes will treat the rituals of the Draupadī cult and the *Mahābhārata* as seen through a Draupadī cult retrospective.

ALF HILTEBEITEL is professor of religion and human sciences at George Washington University. He is the author of *Rethinking India's Oral and Classical Epics* and *Rethinking the Mahabharata*, both published by the University of Chicago Press, and has translated works by Mircea Eliade and Georges Dumézil.

A Chicago Original Paperback

The University of Chicago Press

www.press.uchicago.edu



ISBN-13: 978-0-226-34046-3

ISBN-10: 0-226-34046-5

